

BOOKS BY

**Mary Borden**

MARY OF NAZARETH

THE TECHNIQUE OF MARRIAGE

SARAH DEFIANT

A WOMAN WITH WHITE EYES

THE FORBIDDEN ZONE

FLAMINGO

FOUR O'CLOCK

JANE—OUR STRANGER

JEHOVAH'S DAY

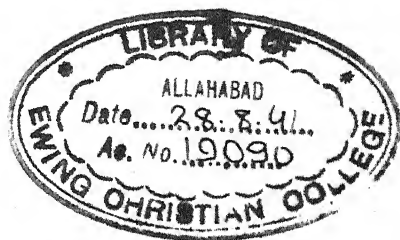
JERICHO SANDS

THE ROMANTIC WOMAN

THREE PILGRIMS AND A TINKER

# Mary of Nazareth

By Mary Borden



Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc.  
Garden City, New York

1933



PRINTED AT THE *Country Life Press*, GARDEN CITY, N. Y., U. S. A.

398.1  
12/21

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## Preface

*"And he . . . came into his own country; . . . And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them."*

The quotation is from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter VI, verses 1-5. Matthew records the same facts, giving a slightly different turn to the remarks of the people of Nazareth:

*"Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? . . . And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Matthew XIII, 55-56, 58.*

I have based my story on the events in the life of Jesus and his mother, as recorded in the four Gospels. It has been no part of my purpose to prove that some of the recorded facts are more reliable than others. I am not qualified to

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do that, did I wish to. But I have dared to endeavour to reconstruct the life of Mary of Nazareth, accepting all the given facts quite simply as true, and in doing this I found myself obliged, at the outset, to take my stand on the controversy over his family that has agitated the minds of theologians for many centuries.

For me, there was no choice. Accepting the account given in the Gospels, I was bound to accept as fact that Jesus was Mary's first-born son, Luke II, 7, the eldest, that is to say, of several; that his mother had four other sons and at least two daughters; that his family did not believe in him—it is John who says so, VII, 5—and at one time thought him out of his mind. And indeed, remembering that Mary was a devout Jewess who feared and obeyed the Mosaic Law, I would have found it difficult not to recognise the ring of truth in these significant passages of the New Testament.

There are not many. Mary herself is not mentioned often. But they seemed to me to reveal the heart of her tragedy, and I have built my story on them.

I would therefore remind my readers that the mother of Jesus lived in the town that hated him (it is Luke who tells the story, IV, 16-30, of how the people turned him out and tried to kill him), and that she went with her other sons to try and put him under restraint. I would further remind them that Jesus's own words betray his bitter disappointment in regard to his family.

*"And when his family heard this, they set out to get hold of him, for what they said was, 'He is out of his mind.'"*  
Mark III, 21.

I give Moffatt's translation, and though some versions of the text put "kindred," others the word "friends," instead of "family," any attempt to gloss over the truth of his family's antagonism seems to me unfortunate, since

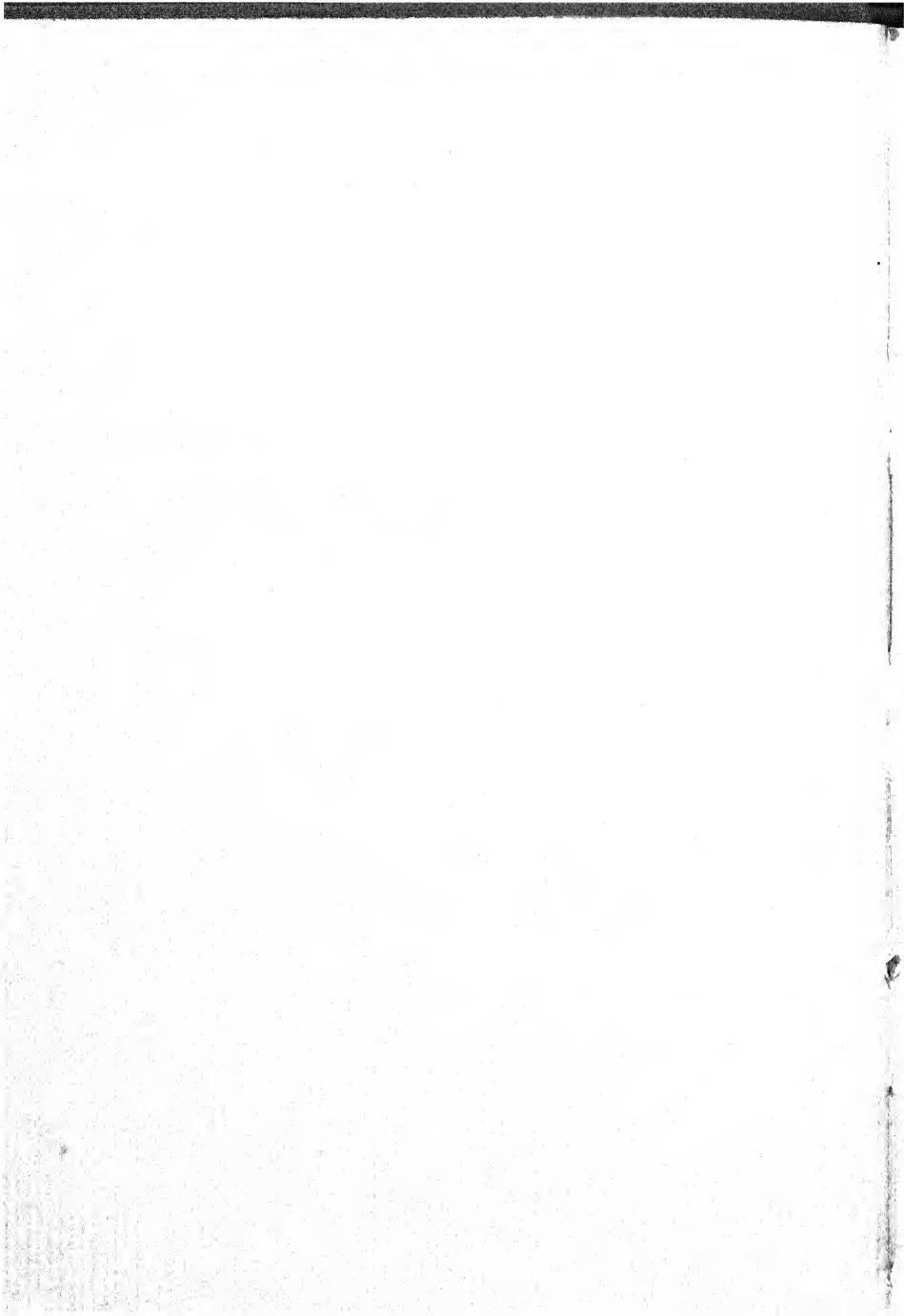
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it makes Jesus's own attitude to his mother and brothers incomprehensible. For we find all three synoptic Gospels relating how, immediately after this, his mother and brothers arrived at a house where he was teaching and sent in word to him, "*Thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee,*" Jesus answered before all the people, "*Who is my mother, or my brethren? . . . Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.*"

All the principal characters in this book and all the important events are taken bodily from the New Testament. All the words of Jesus, from the time when he began to proclaim his "good tidings," are quoted direct from the Bible. I have imagined one conversation between Jesus and his mother before his public ministry. Except for this, I have invented only minor incidents and minor characters.

The Old and New Testaments have provided me with most of my material. Second in importance are the Apocrypha, the Hebrew Prayer Book, and the Talmud. Out of the vast literature on the history of the period, I have read a good many books that seemed to me valuable, few that were entirely convincing, and almost none that were free from racial or religious prejudice. That freedom may be too much to expect. Indeed it may be undesirable. It is, in any case, interesting to note that men still write with passion about the things that touch even remotely the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth.

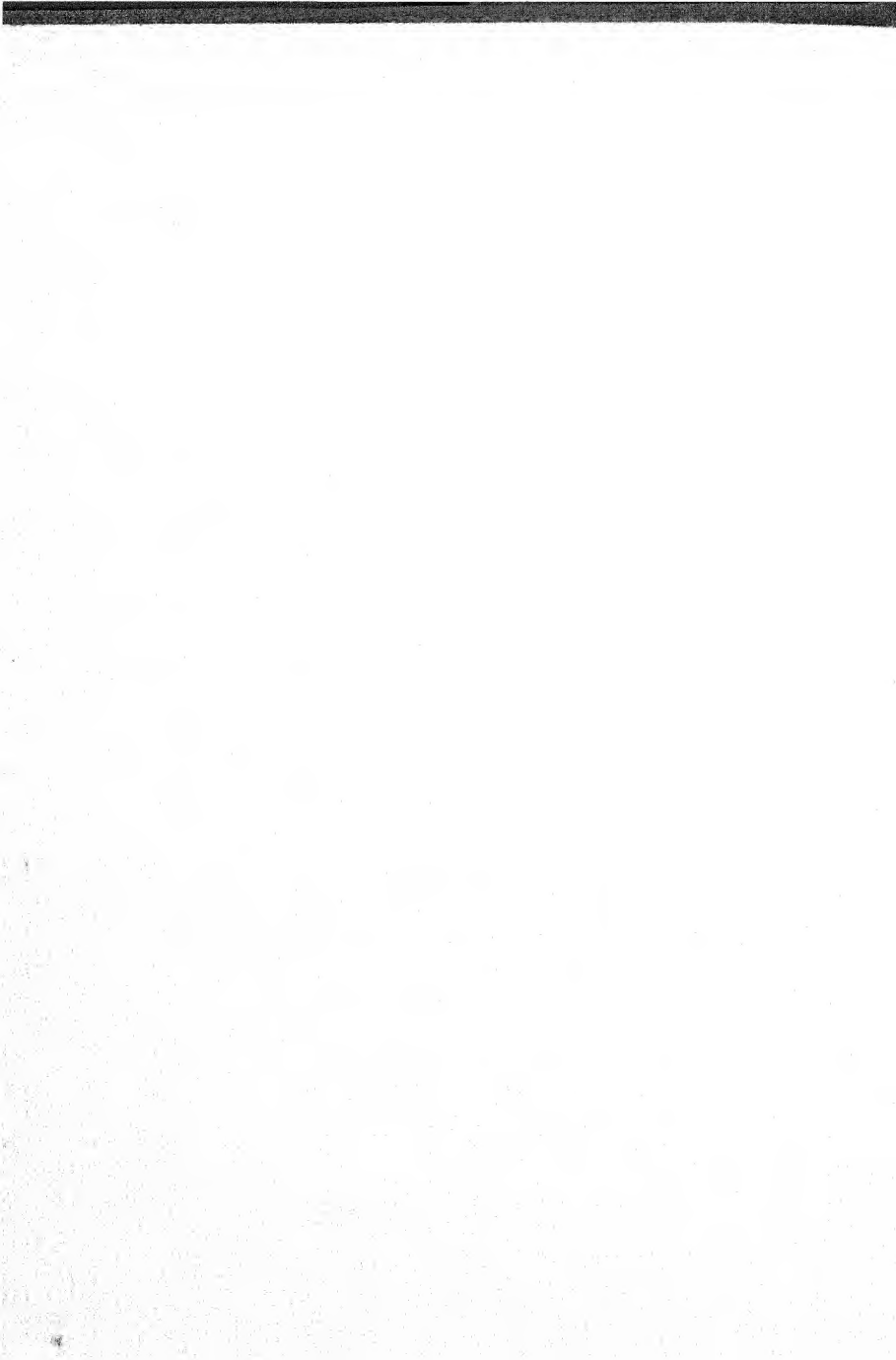
MARY BORDEN.





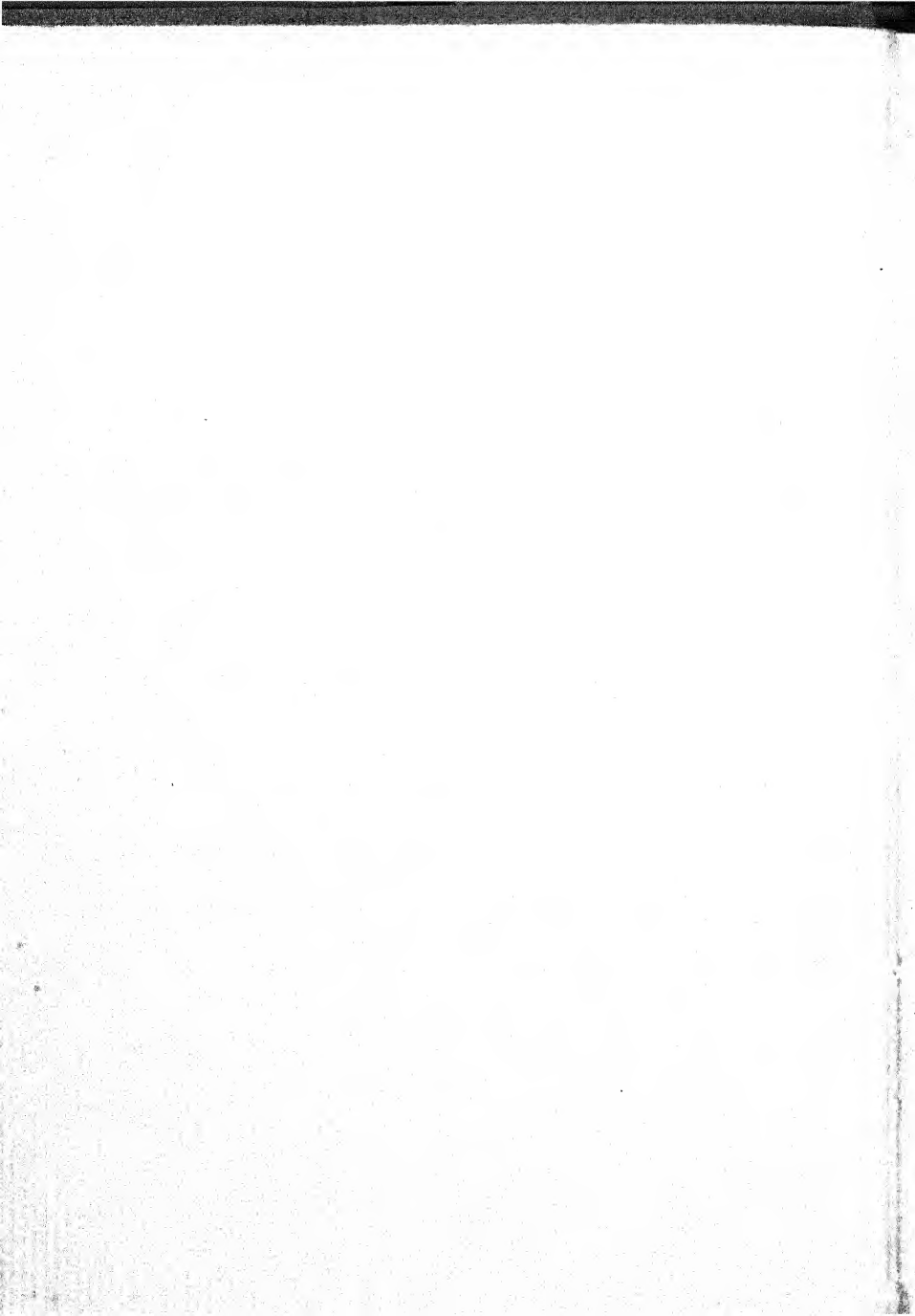
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## Part One







## Chapter One

*These are the beasts which ye shall eat:  
The ox, the sheep and the goat,  
The hart and the roebuck and the fallow deer,  
And the wild goat and the pygarg  
And the wild ox and the chamois.*

**T**HE little boys in the primary school of the synagogue were reciting their lessons. Their shrill singsong chant rose on the air from the open door of the schoolhouse.

*These are the beasts ye shall eat:  
The ox, the sheep and the goat,  
The hart and the roebuck and the fallow deer.*

Again and yet again, all in unison, sitting cross-legged on the floor and rocking back and forth, their round eyes fixed on the schoolmaster, they chanted the words of the Law.

Outside there was a great coming and going in the square that was dappled with sunlight. The shopkeepers were busy. The street vendors were crying their wares. Fish, fresh from the lake of Galilee, and salt tunny fish from Iberia, and lentils and beans and gourds from Egypt, and beer from Medea! The housewives of Israel were laying in supplies, for to-night was the feast of the new moon.

A flock of sheep were coming up a narrow street from

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the city gate, jostling each other and bleating and making for the open archways into courtyards. Donkeys were going down loaded with water-melons and cucumbers. It was spring, the sun was bright, there was a great dust and noise and clatter of discordant tongues. But the shrill boys' voices rose above the din, soared to the blue sky of heaven high above the white pigeons that flew to perch on the roof of the synagogue.

*Of all clean birds shall ye eat.*

*But these are they of which ye shall not eat:*

*The eagle and the ossifrage and the ospray,*

*And the glebe and the kite and the vulture after his kind,*

*And every raven after his kind,*

*And the owl and the night-hawk and the cuckoo and the hawk  
after his kind,*

*The little owl and the great owl and the swan,*

*And the pelican and the gier eagle and the cormorant,*

*And the stork and the heron after his kind,*

*And the lapwing and the bat.*

They were learning the Law by heart as their fathers had learned it before them. With slings in their pockets and smooth stones to shoot at small birds, and the soft wind coming from over the hills to the open windows, they recited after their schoolmaster the Law that God had given to Moses.

It was in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Cæsar that our story begins, in a small up-country town of an insignificant province of the Roman Empire. The brief, glorious period of the Jews' independence had ended a hundred years before in the last civil war of the Maccabees, and now Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, was Tetrarch of Galilee, his brother

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Philip, Tetrarch of the territories to the north-east of Jordan; and all the land was at peace. Indeed it was more peaceful and prosperous than it had been since the days of remote antiquity, for it was subject to a race with a genius for government, empire builders who defended their vassal states and interfered very little with the customs of a conquered people, even when those customs were a continual obstacle to good government and the race that observed them incomprehensible to their conquerors.

Justice, with power behind it, and tolerance; the careful administration of a civil law that recognised the rights of the individual, and the right of appeal to Cæsar for every citizen of Rome, whatever his nationality, these were the gifts of Rome to humanity. Greeks, Gauls, Britons, Phœnicians, Assyrians, and Jews, all were equal before the law of Rome; and the servants of Cæsar were held strictly accountable to the Roman Senate for the fair administration of the law throughout the provinces of the Empire. But no province was so difficult to govern as the small province of Palestine, nor was there any people subject to Rome as stubborn, as baffling, as intolerably troublesome as the Jews.

A peculiar nation, unique, generally detested. No one understood them, no one knew their origin. When it fell to the lot of Rome's most illustrious historian, a hundred years later, to write of his emperor's last, glorious campaign against the stubborn race detested of the gods, it was evident that, even in their final defeat, they remained an exasperating enigma to the power that broke them and scattered them, homeless, over the face of the earth.

Some, according to Tacitus, said they were fugitives from the Island of Crete who settled on the coast of Africa about the time when Saturn was driven from his throne by the power of Jupiter: others asserted that in the reign

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of Isis the overflowing population of Egypt, led by Huro-solymus, discharged itself into neighbouring countries: others again assigned them a very distinguished origin, alleging that they were the Solymi, a nation celebrated in the poems of Homer. Most were agreed, however, that the detestable race had been driven out of Egypt by King Boccharis to cleanse his realm when a disease broke out over Egypt that horribly disfigured the body; and that, finding themselves in a desert, they sat in a stupor of grief till one of the exiles, Moyses by name, became their leader, and, after a continuous journey of six days, led them into a country on the seventh day, where they founded a city and a temple with a novel form of worship opposed to all that is practised by other men. For, said Tacitus, they slay the ram, seemingly in derision of Hammon, and they sacrifice the ox because the Egyptians worship it. By their frequent acts they still bear witness to the long hunger of former days, and we are told that the rest of the seventh day was adopted because this day brought with it the termination of their toils. After a while the charm of independence beguiled them into giving up the seventh year also to inaction, but others say it was an observance in honour of Saturn.

This worship, however introduced, is upheld by its antiquity: all their other customs, which are at once perverse and disgusting, owe their strength to their very badness. Though among themselves they are inflexibly honest and ever ready to show compassion, they regard the rest of mankind with the hatred of enemies. They sit apart at meals, they sleep apart and, though singularly prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women, while among themselves nothing is unlawful. Circumcision was adopted by them as a mark of difference from other men.

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Those who come over to their religion adopt this practice, are taught to despise all other gods, to disown their country and set at naught parents, children and brethren. Still, they provide for the increase of their numbers. It is a crime among them to kill any new-born infant. They hold that the souls of all who perish in battle or by the hands of the executioner are immortal: hence a passion for propagating their race and a contempt for death.

But the dislike of the Romans for the Jews was as nothing compared with the loathing of the Jews for their conquerors. Grateful to Cæsar for their good government? Why should they be grateful? They would rather have had a bad government of their own, and they had a government of their own. They were free citizens, not of the Roman Empire, but of the special commonwealth of God, who Himself had given them a constitution and a body of law higher than any law in all the world. They despised the laws of Rome; they owed no thanks to Cæsar for the privileges he had given them when he made the scheming upstart, Herod, their king. The right to worship their own God in their own way was, they considered, their right already and any concession in that direction by a heathen emperor nothing more than an acknowledgment of an indisputable claim. Nor did they admit that they owed the safety of their houses, vineyards, orchards and herds to the power of the Roman Empire. They gave thanks for every good thing direct to Jehovah, their God-King, who watched over them, loved them as the apple of His eye and instructed their holy men in the administration of the only just law in all the world.

Into the tragic history of their people they read only one meaning. When they broke the holy Law, disaster came upon them: when they kept it, God blessed them



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with peace and prosperity. Always it had been so. All the horror of their wars and their civil wars pointed the same lesson. When the madman, Alexander Janneus, direct descendant of their hero, Judas Maccabeus, crucified eight hundred pious Pharisees in one day, it was Jehovah Himself who was punishing them; and the ten thousand Jews, who fled from their own king into Egypt, continued to praise Jehovah and keep His holy Law in exile.

Egypt had often been their refuge: so often that the Pharaohs were forgiven. Indeed, it was commanded them in their holy writings to be kind to the Egyptians because they had been received as strangers in their land. But they hated all other nations and they hated the dynasty of the Herods who had been put over them by Cæsar.

There were old men still alive at the time of our story who remembered Herod the Great, and they would talk of him with scorn. He called himself a Jew, the Arab mongrel, while he cringed first to one Cæsar, then another. Maybe they had thought him one in Rome or Alexandria. He had doubtless cut a fine figure at the licentious court of Cleopatra.

Herod and Cleopatra, they were two of a kind, the old men would mutter, schemers, intriguers, ready to crawl from one master to another and both greedy for the whole world. It was Cassius, the Roman consul, who had given Herod his opportunity. He had come hurrying to Syria, after the assassination of Julius Cæsar, to raise money for his wars: and Herod, who was governor in those days of Galilee, collected the taxes for the Roman with such zeal that Cassius had given him an army and a fleet of ships. But no sooner was Cassius dead than Herod went over to Antony and made common cause with the Egyptian queen.

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But it was not in God's plan that they should agree together. Though Cleopatra offered to make Herod the commander-in-chief of her army and exercised all her woman's wiles to keep him beside her while Antony was in Rome, the giant time-server resisted her witchery and made her his implacable enemy. The price was paid by Israel. Herod had been forced by Antony to give the harlot of Egypt great tracts of their sacred land, including all the rich balsam groves of Jericho, but he had his evil revenge after her death, when Augustus gave him her splendid bodyguard of four hundred Gauls for his own.

He needed them. Time and again he had needed them in dealing with the people of God. King of the Jews, he called himself; he who had put to death half the members of the Great Sanhedrin, drowned and poisoned and beheaded the princes of the blood and massacred the people in their thousands.

Had the foreign upstart thought he could prove to the people that he was a Jew by rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem? Did he believe that marble walls and gold doors and halls of hewn stone could hide his sacrilege from the people? He had built with one hand and murdered with the other, then built again, palaces in the Greek fashion, theatres and circuses for heathen games, a Roman city that he named Cæsarea with a colossal idol of gigantic proportions representing Cæsar Augustus as the Olympian Jupiter standing in the public square. Herod had never been a Jew. He was a mongrel and an idolator and so were his sons. Had they not made all the Cæsars gods in Israel and built temples to the Roman god emperors to flatter them?

Hope had sprung up in the hearts of the people when he died. Great rejoicing and glorious rebellion had followed his loathsome death. And leaders had arisen to deliver

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Israel. But, and the old men would shake their heads sadly, none, not even the last who was called Judah the Galilean, had been the Messiah, promised by God who was to re-establish the ancient dynasty. And though valiant men had died in their thousands, it had all come to nothing.

Many men in Nazareth remembered that last rebellion and not only the old men. The young men of thirty had been schoolboys when all Galilee was roused to anger by the census of Quirinus and the threat of new taxes. The cry had gone up, This is slavery. Augustus is putting a price on your heads and the heads of your cattle. Hundreds had rushed to arms under Judah, and many mothers living to-day in Nazareth had hid themselves in their houses with their children when Varus, the Roman general, had come through the country with two legions and a host of Arab auxiliaries to burn Zephoris to the ground and hunt out the rebels. How could anyone who had lived through those days forget? Varus had hunted their kinsmen out in the mountains like wild beasts: he had crucified two thousand of the bravest patriots in Israel and sold many wives and daughters into slavery. So now, when they saw a Roman cohort marching through the square or a Roman official sauntering in the garden of his villa, they did not thank the good soldiers or bless the official for being what he was, a conscientious civil servant responsible to Cæsar for their safety and prosperity. They did not say to themselves, Trade is good, food is cheap, there is work for everyone, blessed be the Romans. Nor did they say to a traveller, See how excellent is the condition of our roads. Notice, I pray you, how clean the town is. Look at our splendid new buildings. Truly the Romans are wonderful people. Even the posts arrive regularly nowadays. No, they grumbled about their taxes, looked with disgust on

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the beautiful public baths and theatres and law courts, thought the colonnaded villas on the hills outside the towns no better than silly temples to the heathen goddess of love, and cursed the wise citizens of the world who lived in them, for, though all was peaceful now, they saw again their ruined vineyards, sheep scattering in panic over the hills and heard the wailing of little, frightened children.

What good to them now was the tolerance of this conquering nation whom God had brought upon them as a punishment from afar? They feared tolerance. It filled them with apprehension. It was a sign of the danger that lay in peace. They were a very weak nation, surrounded as a small rocky island by a mighty surging sea of peoples and in their desperate struggle for survival, tolerance had always been for them an insidious peril, and intolerance a holy command. And this their leaders recognised even more truly than the masses. Indeed, their learned men had never been men of the world notable for their worldly wisdom. On the contrary, the wisdom they possessed appeared to be madness.

It had come from God and it was all gathered together in their sacred books. Everything that they knew and wanted to know, all their strange, transcendental history, all the long story of their tragic partnership with Jehovah, the great and jealous God, and the laws he had given them for the conduct of the nation, and rules of behaviour for every man, woman, and child of the nation, moral rules and rules of hygiene, rules governing commercial transactions and rules of courtesy and hospitality: it was all written down, there was nothing a man or a child could possibly need to know that was not contained in the writings.

And so they studied and learned and obeyed the Law and taught it diligently to their children; and those among them who were most learned in the Law were the masters

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of the people; and those who kept strictly to the Law were accounted very holy men. But the priests were a corrupt aristocracy and were the friends of Rome.

I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage.

Thou shalt have none other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them, for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God.

Ten great commandments had God given to Moses and six hundred and thirteen had been added to them and two hundred and forty-eight forbids. Not all the nation feared and obeyed the whole Law. The very poor could not, nor the very ignorant: the very rich would not. Nor were the priests to be confused with the learned men of the synagogues who were guardians of the Law. The learned masters were plain men, proud democrats of the commonwealth of Israel. But the priests were the hereditary nobility and, though they were still invested for the ignorant masses with the odour of sanctity, they, like the rich merchants who travelled abroad, had learned from contact with the luxurious life of the great Hellenic world to despise the Law God had given Moses in remote antiquity, while the mass of the people still adored it.

It had been given them in the desert, when the Invisible God was their only king and they were governed by judges that he himself had appointed; and the vision of God that had come to them in the wilderness was their gift to the world. For the Romans, Greeks, Phœnicians, Egyptians and Syrians had many gods, but their gods were like giants and were the enemies of mankind. But the Jews declared that there was only one God and that

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he was a spirit, who hated iniquity and watched over men and loved them as a father loves his children, and gave them laws of conduct so that they could be worthy of Him. And this belief had made them a peculiar people in the world.

But they were now no longer the same people who had found God the Invisible King in the vast silence of the desert. For they had wanted to be like other nations and to have earthly kings over them, and God had consented to give them a king, and after that they had built themselves cities and taken to living in houses. They had even built a house for the great Invisible God in the city of Jerusalem, and ever since that day they had been a divided people constantly at war with all their neighbours and each other.

A valiant people still and very proud. Freedom was their passion even now when they were subject to Cæsar; and every aspect of life, both public and private, had for them a religious significance; and the supreme court of the land, the great Sanhedrin, was an ecclesiastical court and its president, the high priest, was the holy head of the nation. Nevertheless, the party of the High Priests was the party of the rich, and the party led by the rabbis was the party of the poor, and a gulf divided them. For the people's party, who were called Pharisees, held to one single principle in public affairs, namely, to preserve the nation exactly as it had been in antiquity, and they considered any slightest deviation from their ancient traditions as treason to God. But the Sadducees, who included all the chief priests and big landowners, held that it was impossible to govern a country by consulting the Holy Scriptures and, though they professed to take their stand on the Mosaic Law, they attacked the Pharisees, saying:

You are willing and ready to wreck the weighty in-

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terests of the nation for the sake of a meaningless religious scruple.

And the Pharisees answered:

The fate of the state, like that of the individual, does not depend on man but on God. It is not human strength nor human wisdom nor prowess in war that can preserve Judea, but divine providence. Man is only responsible for his moral conduct. The strict observance, not only of the written Law, but of all the great body of pious tradition, is the one safeguard of the people.

And they had divided the nation during the time of its glorious independence and weakened the power of their kings and brought about the civil wars that had ended in the rule of Rome. And now the Sadducees, being politicians, were very friendly to the Romans, but the Pharisees abhorred them. Indeed, there were many among them who even now, under the dangerously benign rule of Cæsar, would have been glad to die for their law and their tradition had they been given the occasion. Unfortunately, the Romans saw to it that they were given none. No one persecuted them now and no one interfered with their religious customs, unless you could call derisive laughter and shouted taunts persecution. And though the blood of the young men boiled, and many Pharisees had banded themselves together under the name of Zealots after the great rebellion and met secretly in the caves of the hills to plot and plan for a new uprising, even they could not rush to arms because the children of the Gentiles laughed at them in the streets. Indeed, all they could do was nurse their injuries, cling more obstinately to their traditions and wait and hope for the promised King, the great warrior Messiah, who would conquer Cæsar and establish in the place of Rome, a universal Empire of Israel.

God or Cæsar. There was no compromise possible. If

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they chose Cæsar, they knew they would perish as a nation. But they were Jews and they could not perish, nor could they be subject to anyone but the living God of all the world who was king and captain of Israel. Had he not chosen them out of all the nations of the earth to be his own people, a peculiar pleasure to himself? If they seemed to forget, their learned men would exhort them in the synagogues.

Ask now of the days that are past and ask from one side of heaven to the other, whether there hath been such a thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it. Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire as thou hast heard, and live?

Could a small boy hear those words and not be proud over all other boys in the world? Could a people to whom they were addressed recognise any government save the government of God? How could they forget their own history?

Their land, the battle-ground of Egypt and Syria for four hundred years, the highroad of armies that often took no account of them, escaping destruction often by a miracle, but conquered again and again, and slaughtered by tens of thousands and crucified and burned alive and sold into slavery and scattered to the ends of the earth by Medes, Persians, Assyrians and Greeks: flying to Egypt for refuge, thousands of families on the move, blocking the roads, their carts piled high with household goods, abandoning their homes, their vineyards, their olive trees, their gardens: paying tribute first to one conqueror, then another: living for long generations in exile, their holy capital and their sanctuary abandoned, desecrated, the lonely haunt of wild beasts or the scene of heathen orgies: something had held them together, brought them back, saved them from extinction: a hope, a promise, a belief



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that they could not perish nor God utterly forsake them.

Sometimes they had all but lost hope. Often in their despair they had cried out that God had forgotten them. More than once they had been on the verge of dissolution. And when their conquerors were kind to them, many had melted away, married and intermingled with their enemies and been lost to Israel. Under Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, under Cyrus the Persian, under the Ptolemies and the Assyrians, they had been besieged by the great dangers of peace. But always some world convulsion, the downfall of an empire, or some terrible persecution had occurred in time to save them. And a prophet had arisen among them, to remind them of God's promise to establish the line of David for ever, or a great leader like Judas Maccabeus, he who in his acts was like a lion and who got his people great honour and put on a breast-plate as a giant and girded his warlike harness about him and made battles, protecting the host with his sword.

He had come to deliver them from Antiochus Epiphanes, the mad man of Syria, who had determined to exterminate them. Twice had the Syrian sacked Jerusalem and robbed the temple treasury. Ten thousand of the people had been carried off into slavery and the walls of the city had been thrown down, and when he had dedicated the holy temple of God to Jupiter, he filled it, as it is written, with riot and revelling and sacrificed a sow on the holy altar; and when the feast of Bacchus was kept the Jews were compelled to go in the procession wearing crowns of ivy. Moreover, he decreed that every man or woman who kept the sabbath or circumcised a child should be put to death, and he decreed that all copies of the Law should be destroyed and anyone who hid them away be killed; and many men were burnt alive and many young men were torn to pieces before their mothers' eyes, and

## Mary of Nazareth

women were crucified with the infant boys they had circumcised hanging round their necks. But he did not break the people, for they said they would rather die than forsake the Law of their God. And the women were as courageous as the men. One mother was marvellous above all, for she saw her seven sons slain in one day and she bore it because of the hope she had in the Lord. Indeed, it was written how she exhorted every one of them and stirring up her womanish thoughts with a manly stomach said to them:

I cannot tell how ye came into my womb, for I neither gave you breath nor life; neither was it I that formed the members of any one of you. But doubtless the Creator of the world, who formed the generation of man and found out the beginning of all things, will also of His own mercy give you life again as ye now regard not your own selves for His Law's sake. And then, last of all, after her sons, the mother died.

And Judas Maccabeus gathered the people together and exhorting his soldiers to fight manfully, even unto death, for the laws, the temple, the city, the country and the commonwealth, he delivered the nation from their enemies.

. . . . .

But even that great man's achievement had come to nothing. The dynasty of the Maccabees and the nation's glory had lasted just one hundred years. They had quarrelled among themselves, they had destroyed what he had built, now they were ruled by the Herodians and the Romans, and they did not know which they hated most.

Galilee might be a garden. Truly the land they loved with such passionate love was so beautiful that it seemed in the spring to shout for joy. But it was not their own. They did not possess it. Even the temple in Jerusalem was

## Mary of Nazareth

no longer their own. Cæsar's troops kept watch on their national sanctuary from a tower overlooking the adorable building of God. It rose above the holy city white as snow with its many gilded spires glittering in the sun. But no one could go out or in except by the will of Rome; and as a sign of humiliation, the sacred vestments of the high priest were kept by the Roman governor under lock and key.

But the Law was their own and no one could take it from them. Every town in every province kept a copy of it locked in its big chest in the synagogue. The people had died for those rolls of parchment; they had saved them at a cost that made every slightest regulation sacred; and they had built buildings throughout the land to house this, their one precious possession. Fanatic? Yes. If your father and mother and your brothers and sisters have chosen to be crucified for the sake of keeping the sabbath holy, you are not prone to reason about its holiness.

And the synagogue that housed the Law, with its schools where the Law was taught, and its council chamber where the Law was administered, was now the centre and the foundation of the people's existence. Like a flock of sheep they came crowding into it every sabbath and they lived huddled round it; especially in Galilee, where the people were plain, rough provincials, passionately devout, and only went up to Jerusalem to worship in the temple at the time of the great feasts. Indeed in Nazareth, as in all the other provincial towns, the synagogue contained everything that the people needed. Justice was meted out there, disputes were settled, relief was given to the poor, and boys were instructed from the time they were six years old in the holy Law. And no man who feared God questioned the authority of the chief rabbi, who was the guardian of the law. And all men who loved Israel were jealous of the Law,

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for it was all they had now to keep them together, fortify and inspire them in the deadly quiet of subjection.

*These are the beasts ye shall eat,  
The hart, the roebuck and the fallow deer.*

Was it enough to preserve them, a proud and holy nation? Could it keep alive in their hearts the faith in their great destiny? Lethargy was creeping over them, a sleeplessness of the spirit, a gradual blindness and forgetfulness.

Day by day, year after year, the trumpet sounded in Nazareth, calling the people to prayer and the singsong chant echoed in the schools of the synagogue. Farmers' sons and carpenters' sons and fishermen's sons, all the sons of all the people in the town would go every morning and sit at the feet of the school-master and chant after him:

*The eagle, the ossifrage and the ospray,  
The glebe and the kite and the vulture after his kind,  
And every raven after his kind,  
And the owl and the night-hawk and the bat.*

The people who passed would hear them, and sometimes one or another would pause outside the window to listen to the high, sweet, boys' voices. A mother, whose sons were at school, would stop and smile with a soft look in her eyes; or some older woman, whose sons were grown men now; the wife or widow of some good Pharisee of humble condition, such as Mary, the widow of Joseph the carpenter, who lived in one of the narrow streets that led down from the square to the city gate.

## Chapter Two

MARY had lived for nearly thirty years in Nazareth, when that great man called John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness calling on the people to repent of their sins because the end of the world was at hand. And God had greatly blessed the carpenter's house, for Mary had borne her husband five sons and several daughters. But nothing had occurred to lift the devout family of Galileans out of its humble obscurity when her son Jesus came down from Galilee to Jordan to be baptized of John. Neither Joseph nor Mary his wife, nor his children were known beyond the confines of their small, provincial community: except, of course, to their kinsmen who were many, for Joseph was a descendant of the house of David and had many cousins scattered throughout the land.

Jesus was the first born of all Mary's children, and after his death certain writers in Antioch and Ephesus and Rome, who adored his memory, recorded the names of his four brothers, James, Joseph, Simon and Judah. But James was the only one of the four who became notable. Nor did any of those who loved Jesus note the names of his sisters, though it was remembered that his mother had had daughters as well as sons. Indeed, not even those disciples who faithfully wrote down every word of his that they could remember, were interested in recording his life while he lived it. And though many men and women throughout the world would have given all their

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possessions to have known any single fact about his youth, no historian or philosopher among the Jews or Greeks had heard of Jesus of Nazareth at this time. And in the hill town itself where he grew up, though Joseph had always been respected, there seemed to be nothing remarkable about his family. And yet they were remarkable.

But just as the difference between Jesus, the glorious, strong, handsome boy, and his brothers was not the kind of difference to make him seem strange to the casual observer, so the difference between his family and their neighbours was not noticeable in their manner of living. A traveller of Israel who asked for hospitality in the good carpenter's house was received with the same gentle courtesy that he expected from any one of his own people. He might have noticed the eldest son, might have been charmed by the radiant boy, who so evidently loved his father and mother and little brothers and sisters with such deep, confident affection, but family affection was so natural among the Jews that it is doubtful whether anything about the household would have struck him as peculiar, unless it was the atmosphere of happiness.

It was a poor but decent house and, while Joseph lived, not too poor to welcome strangers and homeless wanderers. Coming from Jerusalem you could reach it, on entering the town through the city wall, by the massive South Gate with its high watch-tower. It was low and white-washed, with latticed windows of common sycamore wood, and it had a flat roof where Mary spread her flax to dry and her figs and raisins and apricots. The shop gave on the busy street and the family lived at the back in rooms that opened into a courtyard. But there was a guest-room on the roof reached by an outside stair and although its furnishings were rude it was spotlessly clean. There were always fresh candles in the brass candlesticks, and clean

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towels, also a well-trimmed lamp and fresh water in a jug for washing.

To the good Jews of humble but respectable condition like Joseph there was nothing amiss with it. It was like all the other houses in the street. The Mesusah with its sacred writing hung on the door-post and everyone who went out or came in touched the little metal box reverently, murmuring a blessing as was the custom in God-fearing Jewish households. But the Greeks, Romans, Phœnicians and Syrians who passed down the street wouldn't have looked at it. If they saw Joseph in the old days bending over his carpenter's bench, with a young boy assisting him, they saw without looking. Nor would any rich merchant from Damascus or Tyre, or any Roman official travelling on business from Pilate to Herod's court, have noticed Mary had she happened to be standing at the open door of the shop with a child in her arms. There was nothing about her modest figure to attract attention. She was just a poor Jewess without identity in a long, mean, white-washed street full of Jews.

Still, had some lady of the great, gay, cosmopolitan world happened by chance to peep through the curtains of her litter as she swung past, she of Cæsarea or Antioch would have thought, if she thought anything, How frightful to be a Jew! How dreary to live in one of those squalid houses! What can life be like to such a woman? I would die of it. And then she would have forgotten all about her.

The imagination of sophisticated people is not powerful to construct an alien world without knowledge. Rich, foreign travellers never penetrate the jealously guarded privacy of the poor natives of any land. These citizens of the world, who had come into Palestine with their games and their races and their theatres, were as frivolous as most civilised people are away from home. Nor were the

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serious servants of Cæsar, who were responsible for governing the country, gifted with much imagination. They were soldiers and law-givers; they believed in power and justice. Not one of them had ever been inside the house of a man like Joseph, and not one, had he entered, would have seen anything to envy or admire. Joseph, on the other hand, would have been quite indifferent to their opinion of himself or his house. He was gathered to his fathers many years before the Roman, Tacitus, was born, but it is not difficult to imagine him listening from Heaven with a smile on his grave, good, loyal face to the stories of his people circulating in the literary circles of the capital of the world. For the sturdy carpenter had never recognised any man as his ruler, prince or emperor, save God only. He had watched the feverish, polyglot crowd pour past the door of his shop with complete unconcern. Indeed, his dignity was the dignity of a man who, being totally uninterested in the vices of his conquerors, was unconquerable: and he knew, he had always known, that he was a member of a great, ancient, sacred nation, beside which the glory of the Roman Empire was no more stable than a public show in a vast amphitheatre.

He had always been a good Pharisee, not one of those Pharisees who got the people's party such a bad name by making a great show of piety and parading the streets in long fringes, but a true Pharisee, frugal, sober, hard-working and devoutly obedient to the teaching of the rabbis. And he had brought up his children to keep the Law and honour their mother, because he loved God with all his heart: and he loved his wife and children with a deep, strong, tribal love and his neighbour as himself. Indeed, he knew God and communed with His holy angels, as Mary did, but neither he nor she spoke of these experiences to any one, for he was a very modest man, strong,



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reserved and quiet. He had been a rock of strength to Mary always and a strong protector, and there had always been peace in his house and the sound of children's laughter.

In fact it was only among the strictest Pharisees and the most lax Sadducees, who were called Herodians because they openly supported Herod the Tetrarch and were hangers on of his vicious court and frequented his circus in Tiberias, that the family was criticised. The very pious puritans in his own party said his house was far too full of merriment to be pleasing to God, while Herod's sycophants made sport of all old-fashioned men like Joseph. But the elders of the synagogue, all the solid men in the community who sat on the town council with the chief rabbi, administered poor relief and were the guardians of the destitute, all these said the carpenter was a strong pillar in the house of the Lord, and Mary a true mother in Israel, and poor unfortunate people such as widows, orphans, waifs and strays without homes of their own, looked on his house as a refuge.

The family observed very reverently all the customs of their people, with just this difference: that they carried out their observance, not grudgingly or thoughtlessly, but with a natural earnestness that came from their hearts. Certainly no one who had ever stayed in that house and heard Joseph read the Holy Scriptures in his grave, kind voice could doubt that he believed them to be the inspired word of God. And he taught them diligently to his children, encouraging them to learn the beautiful poetry of the prophets by heart; and he gave each child, as soon as it could read, its own child's copy of the Law.

Joseph held family prayers, of course, every morning and evening; said grace before meat and gave thanks afterwards; but when he recited the creed, as was expected

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of the head of the house, all the little boys stood up like soldiers and recited it with him, crying out:

Hear, O Israel, I the Lord Thy God am One God, at the top of their lungs, almost as if it were a battle cry, and some good folks were perhaps a little shocked at this. But Mary and Joseph were glad. They did not want the children to think religion a tedious, vexatious thing.

And so on a sabbath evening, when Joseph came home from the synagogue, he would find that Mary and the children had decorated the rooms with garlands of flowers for the festive sabbath dinner. And there would always be something especially good to eat, a shoulder of lamb or game from the mountains, or fat pigeons cooked with olives, and cakes, of course, for the children. It would be Jesus's duty, as the eldest son, to pour out the fresh water for the washing of hands, and James the second son would follow him with a clean towel. Then Joseph, before they sat down to the feast, would bless each child with the blessing of Israel, not forgetting the stranger and the poor and the widows. (There were sure to be some such at the generous board.) And then when the little boys had filled their hungry stomachs with good things and the last crumb had been swept up, so that no demons could come into the house, the whole company would sing hymns together.

Sometimes the beadle, who was the boy's schoolmaster, would come with his wife, or maybe even the good Rabbi. And these reverend gentlemen would sit down with the unfortunate folk whom Mary and Joseph had invited because they were too poor to celebrate the Lord's day with a feast of their own, and Mary's sons would help her pass the spiced wine and the sweet cakes that she made, and if there were enough young people someone would play the flute for them to dance.

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All the holy festivals of the land were an occasion of rejoicing in Joseph's house, and the children looked forward to them with eagerness. There was the feast of dedication, when every house in the crowded quarter was illuminated for eight nights. On the first night Mary would light a candle for each member of the family; on the second night she would light two apiece; and each night she would light one more all round, until on the eighth night there were eight lighted candles for every child, and all the house was like a blaze of glory. Then there was the feast of Esther with its boisterous good cheer, and the feast of tabernacles when Joseph, with all the boys helping, made a leafy cabin on the roof and the whole family lived in it for a week to remember the days when their forefathers had lived in the wilderness. And finally, greatest of all, the feast of the Passover.

Joseph always went up to Jerusalem for that if he could, and he would take Mary with him and any of his sons who were as much as twelve years old. What a bustle and excitement there would be in the house then, with all the preparations for the journey. They took a tent with them to sleep in on the way (there were many inns but they were too expensive and too full of Gentiles) and the provisions for nine days or more; for it took seven days to do the journey. And for many days beforehand the boys would come running home from school to help their father get everything ready, and finally when the day came to start, Joseph would load up the family donkey and off they would go, singing and laughing, to join the throng of travellers who were making the same pilgrimage.

But the temple at Jerusalem was a terrible wonder to the children. They would be very quiet when they entered the vast, holy building, with its throng of white-robed priests, the smoke of the sacrifice rising to the sky

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from the altar and all the air filled with the mighty singing of the great choir; and when at the time of incense a great hush fell on the vast multitude of worshippers, their hearts would tremble at the thought of the most holy place behind the curtain where the spirit of the great God of all the world lived in thick darkness. And Joseph would tell the children that this wonderful ceremony was the exact pattern of heavenly things, for he was a simple-hearted north countryman and he knew nothing about the corrupt practices of the priests who looked like the angels of the Lord.

Indeed the boy Jesus was so filled with wonder by the House of God when he was twelve years old and went up to Jerusalem for the first time with his parents, that he forgot everything else in the world and went off by himself and sat at the feet of the rabbis who were teaching in Solomon's porch. And he became so absorbed in the teaching that he began to ask them questions and never noticed how time was passing, and his parents started home without him, supposing that he was with their kinsmen in the company of Galileans who were all going home together. But when they had gone a day's journey they found he wasn't anywhere in all the caravan and they were frightened and turned back to Jerusalem in great trouble thinking he was lost, and found him after three days, sitting in the temple in the midst of the doctors of law, listening and asking questions. And they were amazed when they saw him sitting there surrounded by all those venerable scholars, and his mother said:

Son, why hast thou dealt with us in this way? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing, and he said to them: How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business? and they didn't understand what he meant. And he went back

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with them to Nazareth and was subject to them after that. But his mother, who had had a vision before he was born, treasured these sayings in her heart, and as he grew tall and strong and his character deepened she watched him, wondering for what glorious future God had chosen him, and she would say to herself that he would be some day a very great and holy rabbi.

But if Joseph could not go up to Jerusalem for the Passover he would keep the feast in his own house in Nazareth with great solemnity and ceremony, choosing with care the young lamb that was to be eaten. And Mary would have a tremendous house-cleaning and search the house from top to bottom and in every cranny and corner for any bit of leaven that might be secreted away; and on the holy evening, after they had eaten, Joseph would sit with them all gathered round him and tell them over again the history of the people of Israel from the very beginning, when God himself attended the wedding of their first father, Adam, and his wife, Eve, in the Garden of Eden.

All about Abraham and Isaac and Joseph and his brethren, and the seven plagues of Egypt, and Moses, the great saint and patriarch, who had been placed as a baby among the bullrushes to be found by Pharaoh's daughter, according to divine providence, so that he might save his people and lead them out of Egypt through the desert to the promised land; every year they would listen again to the story, and the good father of the house would read at that point part of the song of Moses, and ask Jesus to recite it to them:

*Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear,  
O earth, the words of my mouth.*

*My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil  
as the dew, as the small rain upon the grass.*

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He would stand up before them all, this eldest son of the house, and looking straight into Joseph's loving face, he would recite the words in his young ringing voice, his face flushed, his eyes shining:

*Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?  
Is not he thy father that hath brought thee? Hath he not  
made thee and established thee?*

All the room would be hushed: all eyes would be fixed on him, especially his mother's eyes. She would look at him with such a wondering, wistful, adoring look, and his voice would ring out in the silent room:

*Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations; ask thy father and he will show thee, thine elders and they will tell thee.*

Should they have known, could they have guessed, just what he was and what lay before him? Did Joseph hear that beloved boy's voice sounding down the world and tremble and feel his heart break in his great side?

*For the Lord's portion is his people. Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.*

*We found him in a desert land and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.*

Such a happy child, so radiant, so loving. How he loved his father and his mother and his brothers and his sisters and his heavenly Father; terrible his gift for fearless, confident, selfless loving.



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*As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young,  
spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on  
her wings,  
So the Lord alone did lead them and there was no strange  
God with them.*

Had a stranger entered, some Greek drunk with poetry and wine, or a cynical Roman, or a frivolous courtier from the Castle of Tiberius, any one of these would have laughed at the boy standing so straight and strong with his proud little face lifted and his shining eyes looking so trustfully into the kind eyes of his earthly father. But no one of that kind could ever have forced his way into that family stronghold, and there was none to make a mock of Joseph when he went on with the long story of Israel.

It was a very different story that he told from that of the Roman historian, for it was the tragic story of a faithless people's relationship to the only living God of all the world who had loved them always as his very own. A long tale of broken vows and disloyalty and forgetfulness and disaster. And the tragedy had begun far back in antiquity when Samuel had been their judge and the people had demanded a king, so that they could be like other nations. Telling it Joseph would explain carefully how great disasters had always come upon the nation when they turned away from God and tried to be like other nations.

Year after year, for all the years of his life, he told the children the story; and he taught them, not only on holy days but every day, to love God with all their hearts and all their souls and all their might and their neighbours like themselves. And he taught them as well to be kind to all those who were in need and always be ready to help any who were weak, not forgetting the good beasts of burden in the stable. And he told them that to lie was an abomi-

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nable thing and to give false measure a greater sin than stealing, because it was a coward's safe way of thieving; and as they grew older he told them that when they were men they must choose wives among their own people and cherish them even as he cherished their mother. Many things did he teach them that were wise and indisputably good for small boys to learn as long as the world shall last, and if he told them other less absolutely true things that he himself believed, but that his eldest son might question in later years, no word did he speak lightly nor was the lasting impression he made ever effaced from Jesus's mind and heart.

And what harm did it do the child to be told by this good, loving man that sins brought their own appropriate punishment, that Samson had been blinded because he had looked with longing on a heathen woman, and Absalom hanged by the hair because he was vain? It may have made Jesus smile when he grew up to recall Joseph's belief that hatred gave a man jaundice, unchastity brought dropsy and calumny chest trouble, while robbery brought a plague of locusts, and non-payment of tithes famine over the land, but if he smiled it was with a great tenderness and respect for the man who had first revealed to him the meaning of the word father.

No, the doubts that assailed Jesus and the despair that came to him as he grew older did not have their source in his home. He never denied the memory of what Joseph and his mother had taught him as a little child. Indeed many of the things his mother told him when he was very small remained in his memory as a source of lovely inspiration, and if some of her sayings, like those of Joseph's, were of a kind to convulse a rational Greek with merriment, they did not affect her son in this way. Indeed it would be safe to say that no other parents in all the countryside could

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have been such a help to this boy or could have instilled in him more of that fiery love of truth and deep sympathy with men that drove him in the end to break with the faith of his own people. Nor could any other mother in Israel have made the invisible world more vivid to a child's eyes.

When Mary in those bygone days put her little boys to bed at night she would tell them naturally and simply what she herself had been told as a child, answering their questions about God and the world as best she could.

Where does God live, Mother?

In heaven.

Is heaven up in the sky?

Yes, Jude, far above the stars.

How far are the stars? Ten times as far as from here to Jerusalem?

Further than that.

How much further?

I don't know, Simon.

As far as the end of the world?

Yes.

How big is the world?

Very, very big, but there are many worlds.

How many?

It is the tradition that there are eighteen thousand worlds, but others were created so long ago that they have already passed away.

Will our world too pass away?

Yes, Jesus.

How soon?

No man knows, only God.

When was our world created? Is it already very old?

But now James interrupted. I know how old it is. I learned it in school. It was created three thousand seven

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hundred and thirty years ago, on the sixth day of the seventh month at the fifth hour. The teacher said so.

But he didn't say when it would end.

Or what was here in this place before.

When do you think it will end, Mother?

When God wills.

Will we all go to Heaven when it ends?

If you love God with all your heart and keep His holy commandments.

Will it be as nice in heaven as it is in Galilee?

Much nicer.

Will there be birds and flowers?

Many birds and beautiful flowers.

Tell us about heaven, Mother.

There are seven heavens, she told them. The first was a curtain that was drawn every evening and removed every morning; the second was the firmament, where the sun, moon and stars were fixed; the third was a place of clouds containing the millstones to make the manna for the holy saints; the fourth contained the heavenly Jerusalem, the temple and the altar; the fifth was the dwelling-place of the hosts of angels, who sang during the whole night; the sixth contained the stores of snow, hail, poisonous dews, rains, storms and thunder; the seventh contained justice, it was the mercy seat of God, it held the treasures of life and peace, the souls of the saints and the dew by which God raised the dead. There dwelt the seraphim, the ministering angels, the throne of glory and the eternal king, the living God himself.

Which heaven do we go to, Mother?

We go to the Garden of Eden. It has two ruby gates. There are four beautiful rivers surrounded by eight hundred kinds of roses. One of the rivers is of milk, one is of wine, one of balsam and one of honey. The tree of

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life overshadows the whole garden. It has five hundred kinds of fruit.

How big is the Garden of Eden?

Sixty times as big as the world. The sages sit there under the tree of life and expound the Law, and over their heads are lovely canopies formed of the sun, moon and stars. Six hundred thousand angels watch each gate.

What a lot of angels.

Think, Jude, six hundred thousand at each gate.

Pooh, there are many more than that, aren't there, Mother?

Yes.

How many?

I don't know. God creates hosts of angels daily who praise Him, then pass away.

Where do they go?

They disappear.

Into nothing?

Yes.

Oh! poor angels!

But the Archangel Michael won't disappear, will he?

No.

Have you ever seen an angel, Mother?

Yes, I have seen one.

Which one? What was he like?

It was Gabriel, and he was very wonderful.

Did he have a sword?

And shining armour?

And a crown on his head?

So many questions! First one and then another would pop up with a new one, and perhaps they would argue.

Teacher says the air is full of devils.

He says, if our eyes were open, we would see ten thou-

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sand devils on our right hand and a thousand on our left.

He meant evil spirits.

No, he meant devils, night hags who fly from one end of the world to another every night and kill wicked children in their sleep.

But he says God visits the world every night to protect good little boys.

How can God visit eighteen thousand worlds? The Master says each world is five hundred years' journey away from the other.

If my eyes were open would I see ten thousand devils, Mother, round my bed?

No, you would see your guardian angel.

At last they would be ready to say their prayers and go to sleep.

*Blessed be thou, O Lord King of the World, who formed the light and created the darkness.*

*Blessed be the Lord our God for the light-giving lights. Blessed be the Lord our God who hath formed the lights.*

*O Lord our God, cause us to lie down in peace. Be thou for protection round about us. Keep far from us the enemy, the pestilence, the sword, famine and affliction. Keep Satan from before and behind us and hide us in the shadow of Thy wings.*

When they had said their prayers, she would go away leaving the night-light burning, confident that a guardian angel stood by each small bed. And if she were apprehensive for Jesus, if she remembered with longing and anguish and wonder her strange experiences when he was born, if the words came back to her to make her tremble that a holy woman had spoken (A sword shall pierce your heart,

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those were the words), Joseph had always been near in those days to comfort and caution her.

He had known always how she felt about her eldest son. He did not dispute with her over the great destiny of the child; but he told her that if indeed Jesus were chosen for some special holy work in the world, she must do nothing to interfere with the mysterious plans of divine providence, she must not let the boy see that she was anxious, nor show him in any way that he was more to her than her other children.

But now Joseph was gone.

Such a true man, so strong, so loyal, so selfless. He had loved the boy Jesus. He had led him about and instructed him, he had watched over him and protected him.

What had he felt or known or suspected during his last days on earth? Had he known as he bent over his awl, fashioning strong yokes for oxen, that war was preparing? Did he realise that his small, weak, helpless people laid claim to exactly the same world destiny as the Romans, and that their dream of universal empire was bound to bring down on them the massed legions of Cæsar in a last war of extermination?

He was a rough provincial, a carpenter, a poor untutored man. He spoke with a north-country accent. Had it not been for Jesus he would have remained for ever in obscurity. How can one tell how much he knew? He and Jesus understood and trusted each other. They must often have talked together over their work in the carpenter's shop of the destiny of their people and the Redeemer, the great Prince of Peace who would come to save the Jews. Was Joseph afraid for his family when he came to die? Or did he believe the Messiah would come soon? God had warned him once to take Mary and her first-born son and fly into Egypt. But when the time came for him to be

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gathered to his fathers he could not take Mary nor any of his children with him. Nor could he work for them any longer. Jesus must now support and protect his mother and his younger brothers and sisters. He would do so. Joseph must have known that he could count on Jesus for that. Who can tell how much more he knew?



## Chapter Three

**J**OSEPH had been dead these many years and Mary's memories had grown dim when her eldest son left her suddenly to go down into Jordan.

A silent woman with haunting eyes, very gentle and strangely youthful for her age, she still lived in the house back of the carpenter's shop, but she was no longer its mistress, for her sons owned it. They were grown men now. All had married at eighteen according to the binding custom of their people, save Jesus and James; and she lived in their house as a guest with her daughters-in-law and her grandchildren. An honoured guest certainly, for her sons, being pious Jews, honoured their mother. Nevertheless, Jesus's going was for her a calamity, for he had become a builder of repute in the town, much sought after to repair barns and houses. As long as he was at home, the family had wanted for nothing, and as head of the family he had cared for her tenderly. Indeed, his presence had filled the house with peace and goodwill, and his mother had come to depend on him for everything. So much so that she would sometimes forget the great hopes she had had of his glorious future. And though at times she had been very disappointed and troubled by his attitude toward the masters of the synagogue, the years had passed happily, for he was a happy man and a good son. But now that he was gone James had taken his place and

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James was very different from his brother, for James was a very strict Pharisee and a gloomy man, though a devout one, and a great student of the Law.

Nazareth was a prosperous town set in a high basin among the foothills of the Lebanons, close to the great highways that led from Rome to the Valley of the Euphrates from Egypt to Damascus. Surrounded by vineyards, rich farm-lands and abundant pasture for sheep and cattle, with cool winds blowing down on it from the snowy mountains, its people were vigorous and high-tempered. Courageous patriots, valiant fighters, and like all Galileans ever ready to take up arms against their oppressors, they were rougher men than the Judeans and though they hated all foreigners they were more liberal-minded than the men of the south, for Galilee had not long been given back to the Jews and was still thickly populated by Greeks, Phœnicians and Syrians. A difficult people to handle, but Herod the Tetrarch was a cunning ruler if a cowardly man, and had managed to keep his province quiet in spite of his heathenish building schemes, the depravity of his court, and his unlawful marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife.

These things, though they were a great scandal in the north country, did not affect the small lives of small people scattered through the towns and villages of the province. It was twenty years since the last rebellion under the great Judah. Since then the discontent had been smothered and the country, to all outward appearances, had been quiet enough.

Not so in Judea. Pontius Pilate, who had been governor now for five years, was bitterly hated by the Judeans. High-handed, cruel and very contemptuous of the Jews, he made a habit of executing criminals without even the semblance of a fair trial; and twice he had outraged the deepest feelings of the people, once at the very beginning

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of his term of office; once, only two years before. He had no patience with the Jews' fanatical religion; he did not understand the passionate jealousy with which they guarded the sacredness of their great temple. He had to do with the corrupt temple officials, rich priests who were politicians, ready enough to exploit the superstitious devotion of the masses in their own interest and that of Rome. He mistook these cynical aristocrats, who officiated at the great ceremonies and controlled the vast temple funds, for its guardians, and he despised them. He was wrong. It was the people who were the guardians of the sanctuary; it was the ignorant, obstinate mass of the nation who were the defenders of the faith; and he found this out to his cost when, to show his contempt for their religion, he ordered his legions to enter Jerusalem under cover of night and plant their standards, bearing the idolatrous emblems of Cæsar, in the holy place itself.

The people, when they saw the sacrilege, had gathered in their thousands outside the city gates and marched all the way to Cæsarea to protest. For five days and five nights they had camped before the governor's house, waiting to be heard, and when at last he had admitted the throng to the racecourse, as if ready to hear their petition, and had ordered the troops secreted there to surround the Jews with drawn swords, thinking to frighten them into submission, not one had given way. Every man of them had fallen on his face, baring his neck to the Roman sabres and all had cried with one voice that they were ready to die for the Law and the temple.

He had been forced to give in to them; the standards had been taken down; but three years later he had again enraged them. He had taken money from the temple treasury to build a new aqueduct for Jerusalem, and this time they had attacked him, to their undoing, with stones

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and he had set his troops on them and many had been killed.

The common people of the north country, all those who belonged to the party of the Pharisees, were filled with fury when they heard of these happenings. Didn't every good Galilean pay his tribute into the temple treasury? The money was a sacred trust given to Caiaphas, the high priest of the nation, for the worship of God, not for the use of a Roman governor. The cry had gone up that the priests were buying Roman favour with money given to God and the young Nationalists were ready to fly to arms. But the well-to-do Sadducees of the town said Pilate was governor of Judea, not of Galilee. Let the Judeans look after themselves. An aqueduct was after all a useful thing. If they wanted to protest, let them protest to Herod. Here was the tetrarch building his new city of Tiberias over a grave-yard and populating it by force with all the scum of the country. No wonder the people round about were diseased and demon-possessed and full of superstitious fears. The place was a cesspool fit to breed a million devils. Its heathen temple was the playground of harlots. If Herod added one penny to their taxes to pay for his marble colonnades, then let them band themselves together.

In the meantime it was spring in Galilee and it was pleasant to sit in the shady place within the gate looking out over the lovely country to the far horizon. The men would gather there of an evening and sit talking at the little tables before the wine shops and the women would meet in each other's houses or at the fountains in the squares and talk of their women's affairs.

There would be talk at the gate of taxes and debts and the state of the crops and the price of wool. There would be talk at the fountains of births and deaths and marriages and scandals of one sort or another.

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And the old men would say, The good days are gone. In our time a man could make some profit in oil or wool or wine, but now what good is there in a flock of fine sheep? When you've paid the poll tax and the salt tax and the house tax and the water tax and the road tax all your profit for the whole year is gone.

And the builders would say, Yes, eaten up, every penny of it, by the Greek architects and the Tuscan stone-masons Herod has brought into the country.

And the big land-owners would say, Soon all the land will be covered with cities. What with farmers being sold up every day to pay their debts and the new roads everywhere, there won't be a field left that a man can call his own. What good does it do the poor folk of Israel to have fine high-roads paved with white stones so that Roman chariots can bear down on them and send them scuttling into the ditches?

But the devout Pharisees who controlled the town council, said the country had never been so prosperous, nor the people so lax in their observance of the Law. Israel was like an over-ripe fruit, rotting at the core. And some of them, who belonged to the Nationalist Party, talked of the coming of the great leader who would surely arise before long to free the nation: but others said, talk of the Messiah was child's talk. The people had forgotten the very meaning of their destiny. And while the men talked at the gate, the women talked among themselves of their own affairs in the little crowded streets and squares of the town.

The housewives and the mothers of families and the old grandmothers and the young girls who were about to be married, the respectable wives of the Pious, the wealthy wives of the rich Sadducees and the mothers of Zealot sons who were meeting secretly in caves in the hills, how

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they did talk to be sure. Always there was something. A three-legged calf had been born to Joshua, the market gardener; Salome, the wife of Ezra, had fallen down in a fit after seeing the devil come towards her riding between the horns of a bullock; Moses, the tax-collector, was divorcing his wife because she refused any longer to make his bed and demanded a maid-servant; the new fashions had arrived from Alexandria; a travelling salesman had come with sandals made of crocodile skin and lovely veils, light as gossamer, and anklets with bells that tinkled sweetly.

And old Anna, the midwife, had had a dream. She had seen the Messiah come riding in at the city gate on an ass that was every colour of the rainbow; and Chloe, the frivolous wife of the hairdresser, had been, God forgive her, to the races at Tiberias; and Rachel, the wife of the town-clerk, was saying that Jesus, the handsome young carpenter, had broken the Law and left the town in disgrace. She had become involved, because of this calumny, in a bitter quarrel with Susannah, the wife of Solomon the miller, and indeed all the quarter would have been set by the ears over it had a wizard not appeared from Damascus who swallowed a sword, climbed up a rope into the air and, putting a little boy into a basket, ran him through and through with a long knife. They had all run to see this dreadful miracle and had watched breathless. Then when they were all faint with the horror of the thing, the magician had opened the basket and the little boy, God be praised, wasn't there. He came running from behind them, quite safe and sound.

They had been very astonished. But a very learned rabbi had preached last sabbath against the man. This was no miracle, he said. It was black magic, and the master of Nazareth had warned them against all wonder workers and soothsayers and wizards who were in league,

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he declared, with the powers of darkness. Let the women of the congregation keep away from such things and look to their homes.

Mary had not seen the magician, nor did she know that the women of the quarter were talking about her son. She kept aloof from the gossips of the town. Indeed, she seldom went out now except to the services in the synagogue, and then she would hurry away without stopping to talk to anyone, for the old rabbi, who had been her husband's friend, was dead and many of her friends were gone away. But sometimes one or other who knew her would meet her on her way to the market-place to bring her grandchildren home from play.

Peace be with you, Mary.

Peace be unto you, she would answer in her low voice, and perhaps she would smile in her gentle way, but perhaps her strange eyes would be sad.

It was noticed that she had grown much older since her son Jesus went away and that her face was wasted.

She's fasting, the neighbours said, as if he were dead. Look how frail she is. A puff of wind would blow her away. But he was always a good son to her and he has only gone on a journey.

Who knows where he has gone or for how long? Perhaps he will never come back.

It was Rachel, the wife of Nathan the town-clerk, who spoke. She was a childless woman with a long face and big greedy lips like a camel's, but being connected with the learned men of the synagogue she was a person of importance in the community and what she said was always treated with respect; so now they came closer, agog for news of the young man who had disappeared so mysteriously.

What makes you say that, Rachel? they whispered. Do

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you know where he is gone? Rachel shook her head, but there was a knowing look in her mean little eyes.

Some say he took the road to the sea.

No, he was seen going down the hill toward the lake country.

Perhaps he's given up his carpentering to turn fisherman.

Maybe he has gone to Jerusalem. His mother has kinsmen in Judea. He may have gone there on a visit.

Or to the temple to do penance for his sins. Was it that do you think? Tell us, Rachel, do you know why he went away?

I know that he broke the law.

Did he?

Do you mean to say you didn't hear of it?

No, not a word. What did he do? What law did he break?

The law of the sabbath.

And more than one. Three, four. I don't know how many.

Yes, yes, it's true. It was when his brother Simon's youngest child fell off the wall. The children were all romping about one sabbath morning and the little girl fell and broke her leg and Jesus carried her to the other end of the town to the Greek doctor.

Then it was to save the child?

But he went to the Greek doctor, didn't you hear, and the child was in no danger. She hadn't broken her leg at all. She had only sprained her ankle. But she was in much pain, and Oh! what a to-do there was in the house with the child screaming, the mother sobbing and everyone arguing as to what could be done. I remember well how the father ran at last to the apothecary next door. He lived, by the grace of God, well within the limit of a



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sabbath day's journey. But when he came and saw the child was in no danger of dying, he, of course, would do nothing, it being the sabbath.

It was a hard thing. The child was whimpering like a little wounded beast by that time. Truly it is grievous to be obliged to let a little child suffer.

Better that a mother should bear the sound of her darling's sobbing till sundown than bring down the anger of the Lord on the little one's head and certain damnation on herself.

Jesus didn't think so. They say he was very angry when he came in and found the child lying on the couch with the bone of her leg sticking through the flesh and all the women of the house wringing their hands.

But she had only sprained her ankle!

No, she had broken her leg.

It's no matter. Whatever it was, he picked her up and strode out of the house before they could stop him and carried her straight to the other end of the town to the Greek bone-setter who lives in that little pink house on the hillside.

Yes, I know. A horrible man, who goes about with a painted woman.

Yes, well Jesus not only went into the idolator's house, he helped the creature bind up the child's leg with his heathen bandages and then he carried her home again and put her, all unclean as she was, into his own bed.

Yes, he did. Exactly that! And polluted the whole house.

It was a merciful thing to do.

It was a dreadful sin.

What did his mother say to it all? Was she grieved? Did she rebuke him?

No one knows. She has not mentioned the matter to anyone.

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But now she is very troubled.

How could she be otherwise? He didn't repent afterwards or show any sign of fear. He went his way all unconcerned, and when the rabbi rebuked him, it is said that Jesus defied him.

How fearful!

How could any son of Mary and Joseph do such a thing? The family are all good Pharisees.

Not Jesus. Jesus is no Pharisee. He's not one of us, believe me, and if you don't believe me, then trust the evidence of your own eyes. You know as well as I do the sort of company he keeps. How do you suppose his mother felt when he brought outcasts into the house and divorced women and treated them as if they were royalty?

No wonder she is wearing sackcloth again.

They say she eats nothing from sunrise to sunset.

And puts ashes on her bed, so that she shall not sleep in comfort.

And often spends whole nights on her roof praying. Her daughter-in-law found her there one morning at sun-up, lying face down, her arms stretched out beyond her head, and took her for dead, she was so cold and still; but she had only fallen asleep.

She's a God-fearing woman and she's doing penance, poor soul, for Jesus. That's what it is.

They shouldered their water-jars.

Well, it's a sad thing to see her so changed.

Very sad.

Her husband was a good man.

He was indeed.

The Lord be with you.

And with you, sister.

Had she been more intimate with them, they would have been kinder. Had she been arrogant, they would have

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understood her. The mother of five sons had a right to be proud. But Mary was a slight, gentle creature; she had never looked like the mother of five men; she had looked, until quite lately, more like a young girl, and the others resented this. It isn't natural, they said, for a woman of her age to have the face of a dreamy child. And when little Naomi, the ailing daughter of the blacksmith, said that Jesus's mother had that strange look because she communed with angels, they were offended.

Why should the carpenter's widow be singled out for divine favour? Was she any better than they? One would think she was the only God-fearing woman in the town. And so they were not ill-pleased now that she should be in trouble. And since her son Jesus was gone they remembered many things against him. But James, they agreed, was a very good man and a great student. He was so pious that he never bathed or let a razor touch his head; and every night, even in winter, he would get up at midnight and light his lamp and study till morning. Indeed, almost all the neighbours envied Mary her shaggy, gloomy son, for it was a wonderful thing to have a scholar in the family. But there were a few who had loved Jesus and were sorry for her, and the children clamoured for his return.

When will he come back? they cried. When will he come and tell us stories again? Has he gone to a very far-away place?

But no one could tell the children where he had gone, for no one knew. All they knew was that he had left very early one morning without taking leave of anyone but his mother. This they did know because Chloe, the inquisitive wife of the hairdresser, who lived opposite the carpenter's family, had seen him go. Her husband was ill that night and she'd been sitting up with him in the room over the shop.

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It must have been, she said, about the first hour. The sun was not up, but the watchman had finished his rounds and there was enough light for her to recognise Jesus when he came out of the house. He was dressed for a journey. He had a strong stick in his hand and a bundle slung over his shoulder. His mother had followed him from the back of the courtyard carrying a lighted lamp that shone for a moment on her face. There was such a strange look in her face. Chloe said it was strained as faces are sometimes at the games, at once fearful and eager, and her mouth was quivering. But quickly, when she got to the street, she had blown out the lamp, put it down and, flinging her arms round her son's neck, she had clung to him. She made no sound, but Chloe had seen, even in the grey morning twilight, how she reached up to strain him close to her and hold him tight. He had had to take her hands forcibly from his neck and push her to one side. Indeed, Chloe said, the two figures had seemed to struggle for a moment and Mary had stumbled when he freed himself. Then he had walked away swiftly and his mother had stood looking after him, her arm lifted as if to wave to him in farewell. But he couldn't have looked back for Chloe had heard his footsteps die away and a moment later Mary's arm had dropped to her side, she had pulled her shawl over her head and, picking up the lamp, crept back into the house.

Old Anna, the midwife, had been very angry when she heard this story. She had brought all Mary's sons into the world except Jesus, who had been born in the south country, and she would not allow anyone to say a word against either Mary or her family.

The hairdresser's wife is a liar, she growled, and that barren Rachel has the tongue of a viper. Mary is doing no penance. She loves Jesus as if he were her very life

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and she's afraid that some harm may come to him, so she fasts to ward off calamity.

But Susannah, the wife of Solomon the miller, though she hated Rachel, tossed her head when old Anna said that. She too had known Jesus since he was a little boy and she loved him dearly for his merry heart. She was a cheerful woman, fond of the good things of life and very free in her way of thinking.

Believe me, Jesus would be very displeased if he knew. She didn't fast when he was at home. She would eat sweet bread and honey cakes like any normal woman. Don't you remember, how to please him, she made an end at last of mourning for Joseph and began to wash once more and rub oil into her face. But now, look, her skin is all rough again and her eyes are sunk in their sockets. It's my belief that her pious son, James, is responsible. It's he who has put the fear of God into his mother's heart. He's one of those who think God will take pity on you if only you make yourself miserable.

But Anna wouldn't have that. James, she said, was a very good man.

Good he may be, if fasting every Monday and Thursday all the year round is enough for goodness, and never touching a drop of wine or a morsel of meat of any kind, not even on the sabbath. The sabbath is no day of rejoicing now in that house. Nothing but prayers, morning, noon and night; and reading the scriptures and solemn talk; and you mustn't do this and you mustn't do that, lest inadvertently you should break the Law; and the children are forbidden to go out of the house, except to morning and evening service, lest they be led by the devil to climb a tree and break their legs again. I tell you, it's a dreary house since James took charge.

Susannah's friends would often gather at her hospitable

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house of an afternoon. Her courtyard was a pleasant place. It had a fountain in the centre where small boys could sail their boats and there was a fig tree that gave shade if the sun were hot. Moreover, there was an opening at the back and steps that led down through the city wall to a terraced garden and a stream, for the ground fell away behind the houses on this side of the street, and Solomon's mill was below on the river bank.

Sitting in the courtyard one could see far away through the sparkling air to the hills opposite where sheep were grazing. Sometimes, if it was very clear, one could see the snows of Mount Hermon, and now that spring had come and the almond trees were in bloom and the birds were all singing, the women would bring their sewing and sit chatting together, while the children played, and usually they would find old Anna dozing in the sun with her cat on her lap.

Anna was too old now to tend the sick or dandle babies on her knees. Too old for anything but grumbling talk, some said, and dreams; but people were kind to her in the poverty of her old age, because of all the loving care she had given them when she was young and strong, and they admired the manly spirit that burned in her gaunt frame. Moreover, she had a long memory and many stories to tell of the days when there was fighting all up and down the land, and the caves in the hills were full of fugitives.

A stalwart woman, her eyes would flash even now and her deep voice growl with anger over the wrongs of the people of God who would one day, and that not long off, rise up under a great leader and wreak vengeance on their enemies. She believed with an unshakable belief that she would see the Messiah come riding through Galilee at the head of a victorious army before she died.

For many years she had been expecting him. Again

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and again had she thought when a new leader arose, perhaps this is he; and she would go off to inspect the man, striding along the dusty roads with her blanket and a bundle of dried figs on her shoulder. But none, not even Judah the Galilean, had been the Messiah.

I knew it the moment I saw him, she would say.

But how could you know, Anna? they would ask her, laughing. Have you seen the Messiah's face in a vision?

Maybe so, maybe not. I'll not tell you if you scoff. But I know how the King of the Jews ought to look, never you fear.

What colour should his hair be, Anna?

Red, she would growl. Red like David's. What other colour could it be?

A great place for gossip was Nazareth, especially the poor quarter of the town where Mary lived, and Jesus had truly given them something to talk about. Susannah, the wife of Solomon the miller, was the head of one faction, Rachel, the wife of the town-clerk, of the other. But Rachel had the Law and the church and all the power of respectability behind her in condemning the young builder; and though Susannah hated Nathan for the harm he had tried to do Jesus, she had no arguments to advance in championing her young friend. She had only her feelings to go on. Indeed, the mean little clerk with his inky fingers, had a very strong case against Jesus, when he brought the matter of the Greek bone-setter to the notice of certain pious members of the town council. He had had no difficulty in working them up to take action against him. They didn't know Jesus; and even had they known him, they would probably have seen nothing in the young man to appeal to them, for he wasn't in the least like them. He was humorous, fearless, natural, and they were bigoted men, who lived in fear of the Law.

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The rabbi must be told of it, Nathan said to them. The matter must be taken into court. Some awful calamity will fall on the whole city if nothing is done to appease God's anger. The carpenter's son has been a law-breaker and a bad example to the other young men of this place ever since he came of age.

And he told them how, even as a child, Jesus's parents had been unable to make him understand that it was a sin to play with the children of Gentiles, and that a sweet-meat offered him by such an one was no better than a bit of dung. The boy would eat it with gusto and give thanks as if to one of his own people. It had been the same with the deaf and the dumb and the blind. He could never be made to remember that these wretched folk were maimed because they were evil, that they were being punished by God, either for their own wickedness or that of their fathers, and that they deserved no more compassion than the thieves, robbers and murderers who were in prison. Again and again as a small boy he would be found talking to the blind beggars in the market-place as if they were friends and he had never grown out of the habit. Indeed, he had continued to treat all such accursed folk as if they were whole men like himself. What was most shocking of all, he would not even turn aside from a leper, but would fearlessly salute the unclean, horrible, damned creature. It was even rumoured that not long ago he had gone out secretly to the leper camp and nursed a leprous woman who was dying; and some said, though no sensible man believed it, that the woman had not died at all but was cured of her leprosy.

And at the age of eighteen he had refused to marry. Why? Not in order to study. No. When his brother James had taken the same stand, it had been made comprehensible, for James had explained that his whole life was to be



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devoted to the study of the law. Certainly it had been a great affliction to the carpenter's widow to have two unmarried sons. She knew, as they all knew, that an unmarried son could not properly be called a man at all. But to sacrifice one's manhood for the sake of study, that was permitted. For study, it was even right to leave one's family, expose oneself to privation and danger. Mary could be proud of her son James, but Jesus had no such excuse. He was no scholar, learned in the Law; he was a dreamer, a vagabond in love with the earth who feared neither God nor man and defied the Law. Who knew? In his heart he might be a worshipper of that heathen god, the one who haunted the woods and whom the Greeks called Pan.

His kinsmen had no control of him. Even his father's brother, Clophas, could do nothing. He went his way like a prince, subject to no one, and he acted in breaking the Law as if he had authority. But what authority? What authority was there outside the Law, that had existed before the beginning of the world? Even if they were deeds of mercy that he did, and he were impelled to do them out of his love for his fellow men, what right had he to do them if they were against the Law of Heaven and the rabbis? It was not permitted to anyone to reason about the Law, nor was any man expected to understand it. The rabbis understood it, the doctors at law knew it in all its details: all that ordinary men and women had to do was obey.

Mary's son did not appear able to grasp this truth. He seemed to think the Law should be both charitable and reasonable, and if it did not appear so to him, he disregarded it. And in matters of tradition his attitude was even more dangerous. He could not be persuaded to drive a hard bargain with a Greek, or cheat a Roman tax col-

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lector, or deliver a poor piece of work to an Arab camel driver. In fact, he treated all this riff-raff exactly as if they were Jews; and he would forgive the heathen camel driver his debt, if he were in need, just as he would forgive a debtor of his own race.

Now he had broken the sabbath, defiled his house and taken the child of his own brother to a Greek bone-setter.

What would become of them if they condoned such conduct? It cut under the very foundations of the community.

The town-clerk was not a popular man in Nazareth, nor much esteemed by the serious Pharisees. He was a wizened little fellow, very jealous of strong, well-favoured young men like Jesus; but he had worked on their feelings with such success that at length six of the leaders of the People's party went with him to the chief rabbi, the master of Nazareth.

They found him in his garden tending his pumpkins: for though he was the chief magistrate in Nazareth, president of the local Sanhedrin and head of the synagogue, he was a very poor man; and they told him the story sitting under his grape arbour while he faced them, leaning his strong old arms on his hoe.

Let the young man Jesus be punished, they said, when they'd come to an end, according to his sin, so that the wrath of God shall not fall on the rest of us. If the builder is guilty of profaning the sabbath with deliberate intent, let him be stoned: if he be proved innocent of intentional defiance, let him be given forty stripes for the lesser offence.

But the learned old man, after a moment's frowning thought, had refused to proceed in the matter or allow the case to come before the council.

It was evident that he was troubled by the tale. His

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furrowed visage was sombre when he answered them; but he said, No. The carpenter's conduct was not a matter to be judged in court. His action in the case of the Greek bone-setter, like his other actions, was not a crime against his fellow men, but against his own conscience and against himself, the guardian of the holy Law. He would deal with the case privately. The public telling of it could do no good to the congregation. There might even be some to argue that Jesus had been right in doing what he did; and an argument or division in the council over the breaking of the sabbath would do much evil. Jesus had, on their own showing, many friends among the poor and ignorant. If he were brought to trial for a compassionate deed there might be an outburst in the beggars' quarter and that might have serious consequences. He would send for the young man. Let everyone else be silent.

And so he had hushed the matter up and sent the deputation away, and for the first time they doubted his wisdom. And though they dared not question his authority, since he stood to them almost on an equality with God, they said:

This is strange talk we have heard from the Master. It is the talk of a Sadducee or some Herodian politician. What have politics to do with the Law that God gave to Moses?

But the rabbi of Nazareth had not been thinking of politics when he refused to do what they wanted. He had been thinking of all the miserable outcasts in the town who were Jesus's friends: beggars, blind men, the deaf and dumb, the maimed and lepers, whose faces were eaten away. Could it be true that the carpenter had gone out to the leper camp? Suppose it were true?

He had had a vision while the self-righteous, self-appointed judges of the young carpenter complained of

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his conduct. He had seen the bright, beautiful, sacred land that had once been bathed in the glorious light of God's countenance, covered with darkness; and in the darkness he had seen a nation of small, blind, feverish creatures who crawled through life as through a nightmare. But the nightmare was his own, for he saw the dark air over the fields and vineyards, and pasturelands filled with horrid shapes, evil spirits, devils and vampires, all the hosts of Samael, the angel of death, and he saw their victims. Beggars were lying everywhere like dogs in the street, their sores covered with flies, and along every road went blind men, tapping the ground in front of them; and in all the caves in the hills he saw men like beasts and he heard the voices of these demoniacs resounding in the distance like the howling of jackals in the night.

Truly there was night over Galilee. Truly a sickness had come upon the people! Never had there been so many demoniacs in the land. It was like a pestilence, a new national disease, the disease of demons.

What was the meaning of it? What had moved God to give so many of his people over to the powers of darkness? Night after night he would search the books of the Law for an answer and a remedy. But the answer he found was always the same, the people had sinned against the Lord their God. And when he discussed these problems with his colleagues, asking them if there were any way of atoning for the sins of the nation, the reverend scholars had agreed that no one man, however holy, not even the great Hillel, could take on himself the sins of the world and free the people. There would be no end to it, they said, until the day of judgment and the coming of the Messiah. But when in his anguish of mind he had questioned the priests who were going to the capital, asking them if it were the same in Judea, they seemed not to

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understand what troubled him. The poor and the sick are always with us, they said to him. Satan is always going about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Let the Nazarenes give more money to the temple for sin offerings. Let them send a special offering on the day of atonement. But one of these aristocrats who was more scholarly than the others, said the wretched condition of the people was the result of the wars. The nation was exhausted. Its best blood had been poured into the ground, all the strong young men for generations had been killed or sent as prisoners into exile. He should visit the Hebrew colony in Rome. There he would still find splendid specimens of the race. But here, it was like the days of Nebuchadnezzar, when the flower of the race had been transported to Babylon, and only a remnant of old men and women were left in the land. The demoniacs were the offspring of generations worn out by the civil wars of the Maccabees. What the country needed was peace and time to renew its strength and its blood.

The Master of Nazareth had felt cold when he heard these words, as if the hand of death had gripped him.

Peace too has its dangers, he had said, nor can the blood of our people be mingled with that of idolators.

The noble priest had smiled. Be guarded in your words, good Master. The women of Rome and Alexandria are beautiful and I am one of those who admire them.

Now he thought of the young builder who was not afraid of lepers and who loved a child well enough to dare to break the sabbath. He had noticed him in the congregation, a tall man with a commanding presence. Yes, it was a beautiful face. It stood out from all the other faces that were turned to him in the meeting-house. He saw it now, met the strange look, the eyes challenged him.

The learned Rabbi of Nazareth was no man of the

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world. He was a plain man of the provinces and he saw himself as the poor shepherd of a flock of sheep and he saw his flock as they were, and they filled him at times with despair. But the young carpenter was different from them all.

He would go to him. He would point out to him the great danger of breaking any law, even in the name of charity, and then he would talk to him. He would like to talk to him.

But when he went to the carpenter's house, asking to see Jesus, he was told that the eldest son was gone down into Judea and no one in the family knew when he would return, for no letter had come, no message, no news of any kind.

## Chapter Four

**I**T WAS a pedlar from the south country who brought the first news of Jesus to the carpenter's house, the impudent Arab fellow in the ragged turban and dusty coat who had gods for sale and little pots of scented oil and bangles and nose rings. But he didn't know as he gossiped, spreading out his wares and smiling with a great flashing of white teeth in his dark face, of whom he was speaking, nor did any of the family suspect it was Jesus.

He called himself an Egyptian to gain admittance to the houses of the pious. Was it not written, Be kind to an Egyptian for you were strangers in the land of Egypt? And he came north every spring when the fruit trees were in bloom in Galilee. All the way from Egypt across the plain of the Philistines, round by the scented balsam groves of Jericho and up the Jordan valley to the busy shores of the lake of Galilee, through Herod's cursed town Tiberias, and Magdala, the frivolous city of dye-makers and perfumers, and lovely Capernaum; squatting cheerfully on the sunny steps by the blue water or under the black towering walls of the tetrarch's castle, he shuffled along, whining his wares and collecting the news of the world to pass on to the outlying villages.

He was a familiar figure in Nazareth and would come into the courtyard behind the carpenter's shop and call out, Hail! Oh daughters of the righteous, I bring news and treasures from abroad, and the young women would

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run to see his wares and hear his gossip of the great world. But Mary, the mother of the house, did not come out of her inner room that afternoon. She cared as little for news of Cæsar's health and the latest scandal of Herod's court as she did for the little household gods of painted wood that stood on their heads in the bottom of the man's basket: so she didn't listen from her distance to his glib, chuckling chatter. Even when she caught the words, hermit, wilderness beyond Jordan, prison, she did not stop laying the table for the evening meal, though she paused a moment at the sound of the word prison with a plate of quinces in her hand because her heart missed a beat and she felt giddy.

But it is because I am faint with hunger. This can have nothing to do with us, she whispered to herself standing alone in the shadowy room. He cannot possibly be speaking of anyone known to me. No, I will not ask him. So she fetched the bread from the larder and the sweet butter that she had vowed she would not taste again till her son Jesus came safely home and the curdled milk in the big yellow bowl, and she arranged everything nicely though her knees were shaking under her. But when she had done, her anxious longing was too much for her and she went to the door.

The fellow was holding up a black gauzy scarf with a silver border and her daughters-in-law were fingering it lovingly.

Only two dinarii, my beauties, and it is like a cloud over the moon. Yes, all Judea is in a ferment. For months now the roads have been black with pilgrims, as at the time of a holy feast or a great fair, and all the people are in a ferment. Even the soldiers have been affected. Half a company has deserted, so they say, from the temple guard in Jerusalem. If the end of the world is at hand,



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what need, the soldiers say, of an army? We too are men and fathers of families. Pure silver thread, my daughter, it will not tarnish.

They did not notice her standing there behind them in the doorway and she found it difficult to speak. But at last she did speak in her soft voice.

Tell me, stranger, since you come from the Jordan valley, did you see my son?

What a foolish question! No wonder the young women smiled with pity and the man stared astonished. How could he know her son, even if by some miracle he had happened on him in that vast gathering by the Jordan. She knew her question was childish, but what other could she ask him? It was all she wanted to know. Your son, my lady? There were many thousand mothers' sons on the road as I passed. The fellow was grinning into his sleeve.

She flushed faintly and moistened her lips.

My son's name is Jesus, she said proudly. He is not like other men. Then she faltered. Why had she said that? But why not? It was true. And what matter if she seemed to them like a woman out of her wits? She must know what she wanted to know. She faced the Arab bravely.

You mentioned a hermit. Her tone was courteous. There is a man called John who has appeared from the desert. Is it the same?

The very same, lady. The pedlar grinned with delight. A very holy man and a great preacher. He has made much trouble among the people and is put away in prison.

She groped for something to hold to.

Where? She faltered. By what authority? Has the great Sanhedrin taken him?

No. It was Herod who did it. The tetrarch has sent

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him to the fortress of Maechara on the borders of Arabia. It is said that he is very angry and will put him to death for declaring that his marriage to Herodias is unlawful.

How dim the light was. Even the courtyard seemed to be in shadow. Hark! What was that sound of fluttering? Was it only the children's pigeons come flying over the roof to the pigeon house? Once long ago, she had heard a rush of wings not very different from this soft sound and a voice had called her by name saying, Fear not, Mary, He shall be great. He shall be born of the Holy Ghost. He shall be called the Son of God.

Oh why had he gone after the dangerous wizard of the waste land who cursed Herod the king and stirred even the soldiers of Judea to rebellion? What had he done? What had she done that all her hopes for him should come to nothing and worse than nothing? Where had she failed him? How could she have kept him safe at home? What awful spirit of unrest had driven him to defy the holy authority of the synagogue and abandon his family to follow this strange man who proclaimed the end of the world?

She saw his figure receding swiftly in the morning twilight, seemed to hear his footsteps growing fainter while his voice rang again in her ears.

I must go. We must be ready. Great events are preparing. The people are in peril. They have fallen asleep on the eve of the end of the world and there is no one to wake them, for their watchmen too are asleep. They are dumb dogs who cannot even bark. Now there is this one man. Like the prophets of old, he has arisen to warn the nation. He is a voice crying alone in the wilderness.

What are you saying, Jesus? Of whom do you speak? How do you know that this man is a prophet come from

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God? The prophets are dead. There has been no prophet in Israel for three hundred years.

He had begged her to endeavour to understand and believe. But how could she understand him or lend herself to this terrible talk against the holy rabbis? And how could she believe that the world was coming to an end suddenly? Did he mean that all in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, this house, these tables and chairs and Bathsheba the children's goat who was nibbling a bunch of leaves, and all the town she knew so well with its busy market and its trumpet summoning the people to prayer, would vanish, be as if it had never been? She had always known that some day there would be an awful judgment when all the dead would rise from their graves, but she had never thought of it as coming in her life-time, nor did she know what Jesus meant by being ready.

I love the Lord God with all my heart and all my strength, Jesus. Isn't that enough?

He had looked at her a long moment.

Yes, he had said. It is enough. It is more than all the teachings of the rabbis. But it is not true of the people. The people are led by schoolmasters who have lost the key to the knowledge of God. The rabbis can teach them nothing for they know nothing.

They know and teach the holy Law.

No, they have forgotten the Law. They have made it a dead thing and buried it under their dead tradition. They know nothing but the rules they themselves have invented. Rules cannot save a nation in peril.

But what peril do you mean, Jesus? Has anything happened? I know that Pilate——

The danger will not come from Pontius Pilate. I'm not speaking of war or rebellion or the danger of another massacre. The danger is in ourselves and our faithlessness.

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We are a small people and very weak as the world counts weakness. We have no army, no power over our own land, no voice in the councils of the nations. But we are the people whom God chose out of all the world to be a kingdom of priests. He did not choose us because we were many or because we were braver than other men, for we were fewest of all. He chose us because He loved us. And that was our destiny, to make known to the world the love of God and found the Kingdom of Heaven.

Who remembers? Who cares for God now, to-day in Nazareth? Who knows Him and loves Him and lives with Him as children do in the house of their Father? But that, I say to you, was our peculiar duty in the world, and if we do not do that, we are nothing.

Don't you understand? We have lost our way. We are no better than blind, helpless sheep, stumbling on the edge of a precipice, and not one of our masters is a good shepherd, for not one speaks the truth.

Do you make the Master of Nazareth a liar?

She had spoken sharply, so shocked by his words that her mind was suddenly stiffened against him, and she had thought, If Joseph were alive he would not dare to talk so. I must use my authority. I must rebuke him as his father would have done. I must not let his strange power overcome me. He has been led astray by some foreigner. Some evil Greek has put a doubt in his soul, and she cried out,

What has come over you, Jesus? Have you forsaken the faith of your people? Your father taught you to revere the elders of the synagogue. You know that the Rabbi of Nazareth is a good and holy man, learned in the word of God.

His mind is dark, Mother.

Dark with the word of God?

Dark with tradition.

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She could not follow his thought. Her will clashed with his, but her mind faltered and she said faintly, Your brother James tells me that he knows all the twenty-two books of the Law word by word.

Words. One hears nothing but words in the synagogue. Written words that once were the living word of God they are empty now. And spoken words endlessly repeated till they sound without meaning. And the scribes argue in the schools as to the sense of these dead words and between words of wisdom and words of foolishness none can choose.

They debate all night, I have heard them, as to whether an egg laid on a holy day can be eaten by a pious man; and I have seen them in a frenzy over the length of fringes on a night-gown, and when, roaring like bears over the matter, they have split the strong law of good and evil into a million hairs, weightless as thistledown, they decree that a man who forgets one single word of their wisdom will be cast into the burning pit of Gehenna for ever.

How could she not be terrified? He would talk sometimes far into the night, striding up and down the room with the candle throwing his huge shadow on the wall. She would hear James stirring, hear him mount to the room where he kept his books, and her heart would break between the two of them. James upstairs bending his weary, unkempt, haggard head over the sacred books of the Law, and Jesus who defied the Law, pacing the room like a lion.

It is all lies, and they know in their hearts it is lies.

Hush, I pray you, Jesus, be quiet.

I cannot be quiet, Mother. I cannot be dumb any longer or listen any more to the dry rustle of their words. We are lost if we listen to them. Our people will perish. Can a dry wind among dead leaves save a nation that is dying of thirst?

But the land is rich, Jesus. And the rains have been

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abundant this winter. I bought oil to-day three pennies cheaper than last season.

He had smiled then. Dear Mother, he had said, stopping by her chair, what a little child you are! and he had touched her hair gently. But an instant later his face was dark again.

We are like drunkards lying in the road in the way of a chariot and those who are meant to save us stand arguing as to how many cups of wine should befuddle a man. If a priest should drink, then one cup; if a tax collector, then no cup, he is as good as drunk without any; but a very holy sage could drink all the day and being holy the wine would be as harmless as water.

And the living God chose us for his own, promised to watch over us, be our captain and king, promised to fight for us. Be of good courage, for the Lord thy God will fight for you. Why should He fight for us? What right have we to count on Him? Have we kept our promise to love and fear and obey Him?

No, but we wash our hands. No, but we sacrifice rams, bullocks, heifers. No, our hearts are black, but the blood of goats makes them white in the eyes of God and a scape-goat carries our sins away and lo! we are free to sin again until the next day of atonement.

And our old men say, The people has lost heart, the priests of God have profaned the temple, Herod is living in sin with his brother's wife: but we have the Law and men learned in the Law. And the women say, God himself spends three hours of the day studying the Law and consults the rabbis who have passed into heaven on subtleties of the Law, therefore the holy rabbis are greater than God himself. And our young men say, When the Messiah comes, he will be a great warrior and we will fight under him and destroy Cæsar. I say to you, Mother, that if

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there is no change of heart amongst us nothing can save us. No, not even the Law. For the Lord our God will destroy, not Cæsar and the power of Cæsar, but His own faithless people who have forgotten Him.

She had listened trembling, her hands clasped tight together and her heart sick within her. He was her glorious eldest son. Once she had known that he was chosen by God for a great destiny and she had given him to God when he was only a few weeks old, just as Hannah, the other mother in ancient Israel, had given her son Samuel. And she had often thought of that mother of long ago whose son had judged Israel. Jesus could never be a priest, he was not of the sons of Aaron, but he could be a holy rabbi; and when he was a child and she taught him his first lessons, that had always been her dream. But then her husband had died and Jesus had had to work to feed and clothe his younger brothers and sisters, and for a time, when he was still a young lad, they had been very poor; and in their struggle together against poverty her dream had faded. But he had always been a good son to her and had faithfully gone with her to the synagogue every sabbath day; and when he was a grown man, established in the town as a builder, he had gone up to Jerusalem every year for the holy feasts as God commanded. And though he had not devoted himself to study as James had done, how could she blame him when he was such a good workman? Was it not for her that he did it and his brothers and sisters?

Perhaps that was where she had sinned. She had been too happy and too comfortable. She had forgiven him too much because she had loved him too much. Even when he had refused to marry, she had let him have his way, because in her heart she had been glad that he would not take a wife; and when, instead of poring over the books of the Law like James and sitting at the feet of the elders,

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he had insisted on studying alone and had taken to wandering in the mountains, she had defended him to James and been annoyed when James found fault with him, though she knew James was right, for James had the authority of the synagogues behind him and when he rebuked Jesus, he would do so in the words of one of the holy sages. He would fix his gloomy eyes on his radiant elder brother as he came striding into the house after one of his wanderings or from playing with the children and say:

Rabbi Jacob has said, He who is walking by the way and studying, and breaks off his study and says, How fine is this tree. How fine is that fallow, him the scripture regards as if he had forfeited his life.

Or:

Akabaya, the son of Mahahel, said, Reflect upon these things and thou wilt not come within the power of sin. Know whence thou camest and whither thou art going and before whom thou wilt in future have to give account. Whence thou camest? From a putrefying drop. Whither art thou going? To a place of dust, worms and maggots. And before whom wilt thou in future have to give account? Before the supreme King of Kings, the holy one, blessed be He.

But Jesus would only laugh affectionately and pick up one of his small nephews or nieces and toss him in the air and say:

No, brother, you are mistaken. I am not going to a place of dust and worms and maggots. I am going to Heaven that is full of the laughter of little children.

Now suddenly this Jesus was become a stranger, a man on fire with a terrible doctrine, who recognised no authority on earth but the authority of an unknown wizard who had appeared in the desert and was stirring up all



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the people of Judea. She dared not rebuke him, but she cried out:

What sign has John given of being a prophet of God?

He speaks the truth. He is calling on the people to repent of their sins.

Do you know the truth better than the learned men of the synagogue?

I know God.

He had looked at her as he said it and she had caught her breath and her heart had seemed to turn over in her side, for his eyes were true and his face was wonderful, but the words he spoke were almost blasphemy; and in her terror for his immortal soul, she tore her eyes from his face and deafened her ears to the sound of his voice and began to reason with him as if he were a wilful child.

If he was persuaded that the people were lost in sin and the rabbis ignorant of God, why did he not set himself to study and become a teacher? He had offended against the Law because of his love for a child, but the Master of Nazareth would understand and forgive him if only he would make amends and the neighbours would grow tired of talking against him; they would forget all about the Greek bone-setter if only he would wait, be patient. Then when he was forty he could be ordained and become himself a great rabbi who would teach the truth.

He had turned on her at that as if in despair.

I have no master here, Mother. I know no one in this place with power to forgive me my sins and I have no time to wait for the approval of the neighbours.

James had interrupted them. He had come down for a candle and a cup of warm milk. His lamp had gone out, he was shivering with cold, and while she was heating the milk, Jesus had left the house, though it was still many

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hours before dawn, and when he came in he was silent. Nor had he talked to her again before he went away.

Then the rabbi had come. The good Master had knocked on her door asking to see Jesus, and she had had to tell him that he had gone down into Judea.

Now the man John was in prison and she did not know what had become of her son.

The pedlar was packing up his things, well pleased with himself. Her daughter-in-law had bought the scarf.

Look, Mother, only two dinarii.

Yes, child, it is a pretty thing.

The man was going. She must stop him, learn something more. She came out quickly into the courtyard.

Tell me, were any others put in prison? Were there any among the followers of the hermit who were taken?

I do not know, lady. I heard that some of his disciples had gone with him to the fortress, but in the bazaars of Jericho they said that all the people were gone off like a flock of sheep after a new preacher, a stranger from the north who healed the sick. A dyer of wool in Magdala told the same tale, but he did not know the man's name. Peace be with you ladies.

She went back into the room when he had gone, for she remembered suddenly that she had made some cakes for the children's supper and left them in the oven; but when she took them out they were burned quite black.

Oh! Oh! she said to herself, What a pity! And she almost wept in her weariness over the burnt cakes she had promised the children.

But there was no time to bake fresh ones and nothing she could give them instead, so she sat down again in the doorway with her sewing and she prayed to God to protect her son as she sat there so quietly, making no sign of the terror within her.

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She would have heard, she told herself, had any great harm come to him. He would have written or sent her a message. Surely if he were in trouble he would turn to her.

But instantly she felt such a sharp, quick pain that it was as if she had been stabbed in the side, and she bent sideways huddling herself together to ease the place.

What is it, Mother? Are you ailing?

No, child, no, it is nothing.

Why had he turned from her? What had she said to anger or disappoint him? She knew she was an ignorant woman, very slow of understanding, but she was his mother, and she loved him more than all the world. More, she believed, than any other mother had ever loved any other child.

Mary, do not be afraid. He shall be great. He shall be called the Son of God.

How far away it seemed. The shepherds peering in at the stable door, the scent of hay and the three sages from the East who had come with gifts. It was like a strange, beautiful dream. It had not seemed strange to her then in her blissful weakness, that such venerable wise men should bring gifts from so far to her new-born son, but she had wondered afterwards what it all meant. For Joseph told her that they were astrologers, men versed in the Persian study of the heavens, and that they were come to find a child whom they had read in the stars was to be King of the Jews. She and Joseph had smiled to think they had found instead a little boy lying in a manger full of sweet hay, but the strangers had seemed in no way disappointed. Indeed, they had knelt down before her son as if to a king, then had left their gifts and gone away.

The King of the Jews! Joseph had said the Eastern sages spoke in parables as the prophets of old, that they were very holy men of their race who cared nothing for

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any earthly kingdom. He had reminded her that the plans of God were a mystery hidden from men. They could not tell what God willed for their little boy, they must simply have faith.

But the strangers had warned Joseph before they went away. They had told him how they had first gone to Herod inquiring where the child was to be found, and how Herod had been thrown into a great, raging fear when he heard their business, thinking the power was about to pass from him and his family; and they said he vowed every male child in Bethlehem under two years old should be put to the sword, and after that an angel had warned Joseph to fly with her and the child into Egypt. So when they had been to Jerusalem to dedicate the child to God they had gone down into the land that had so often been a refuge for their people in the past.

Children never knew what their parents suffered.

How hard little Simon was on his clothes! He had torn a great rent again in his smock. But it was always so with little boys. Ever since she could remember she had been putting patches into small boys' garments. First for Jesus, then for James and Joseph and Simon and Judah. Now here was another small Joseph and another Simon tearing their clothes on brambles, tumbling into muddy brooks, falling and hurting themselves and running to their mother to be comforted just as Jesus had done. But her other sons who had once looked up to him as their elder brother didn't even mention his name now that he was gone. They were silent to spare her feelings, because they knew she could not bear to have them talk against him, but she was not deceived. She knew they looked on him as a faithless son and a sinner.

It was not true. Indeed it was not true. But she could not blame them for not wanting to go abroad in the town.

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She knew the neighbours were all talking. They would stare when she passed and whisper among themselves and smile pityingly. Even her kinsmen pitied her. Even her sister and her sister's husband, Clophas, and his son Simon the Zealot who loved Jesus, they all believed that he had gone away because he was afraid of the Master's anger and they were all sorry for her because he had abandoned her.

How dared they pity her? If she did not complain, what right had they? If she believed in him——?

You must believe in me, he had said to her when she clung to him. If you do not believe in me——

She saw his solitary figure moving away from her down the silent street that was filled with shadows and ghostly dawn. A lonely man!

And so she went about the house helping her daughters with their sweeping and baking, or sat with her sewing by the door of the inner room at the back of the courtyard, and the days passed and no message came, and no one in the household mentioned Jesus's name, and the house seemed to her to be dark and silent and empty of life; and then one evening when they were all gathered round the table for supper, another traveller came from the south, but this time he was a friend, and he came running all the way from the gate, and he knocked so loudly that they all got up suddenly and ran to the door. But she stood still for she could not move, and then the next thing she knew the room was full of people again, and the neighbours were all running in. Her sister was there, and her nephew Simon, Susannah the wife of Solomon too and old Anna, and they were all talking at once.

She could not understand at first what they were saying or why they were laughing in such an excited way. It was a great teacher they spoke of. He was healing the sick.

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He was coming north into Galilee followed by multitudes.

I saw his face. It was like a star, she heard the traveller say. I was as close as I am to you and I didn't recognise him, but when I heard his voice I knew, and I called out, Jesus of Nazareth, don't you know me? and he smiled.

What had he said? She came forward trembling. Did you see Jesus? she whispered, pressing her thin hand to her side.

But it is he, Mother, don't you understand?

Who is he?

The teacher, the great healer, is Jesus. And he is coming home followed by a multitude.

He sent you a message.

He said we were to meet him.

He is coming to Cana.

To our kinswoman's wedding.

He has a host of followers.

And many disciples.

Why do you weep, Mother? Why do you weep? Don't you understand? His fame has already spread throughout all the south country.

But it was too much. She was too faint with fasting, too weak and too weary with anxious waiting. She could only lay her head on the table and weep for gladness.

## Chapter Five

**T**HE sun had dropped behind the steep hills at the back of Capernaum; the town was in shadow, but the lake was still flooded with light. There was no wind, the surface of the water was like glass. Far out some fishing-boats were becalmed, their sails poised like the wings of birds. Voices could be heard calling faintly from one boat to another.

A crowd was gathered in front of a fisherman's house. It filled all the quayside and overflowed into the boats that were tied up to the quay; a crowd of humble folk, fishermen, builders from the neighbouring shipyards and labourers with their wives and children. They were quiet, for a voice was speaking to them that seemed to vibrate with all the love and pity and courage in the world. Many strong, bronzed fishermen had tears in their eyes as they listened, many women wore an expression of wonder as if the voice of the quiet lake or the silent mountains were speaking. But the words were simple and easy to understand.

Repent and believe the good news. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, and you who are poor shall be blessed for you shall inherit the Kingdom of God; and blessed are you who are hungry for you shall be filled; and blessed are you who weep now for you shall be glad.

They listened humbly. No one had ever spoken to them like this before. He did not speak like a scribe or any learned master they had ever known. He spoke as if he

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loved them, and under the spell of his voice the very poor among them and the hungry ones and the broken-hearted, believed what he promised; and all who through poverty had broken some of the many laws about what was clean and unclean and had thereby forfeited all hope of eternal life, began to hope again. But the others only half listened. They seemed to be waiting for something to happen. There was a hushed expectancy in the crowd, a mingled feeling of adoration and fear and suspense. Here and there on the edge of the gathering a man would whisper:

Who is he?

What is his name?

Whence has he come?

More people kept coming. Such strange figures they were, the late-comers. From every little side street they came hurrying as best they could, hopping valiantly along on their crutches, dragging themselves eagerly forward on all fours, their faces strained and twisting with the painful effort, or helped by friendly hands, and some were carried on their beds. Every few minutes the crowd would part to let the stretcher-bearers through.

Verily, I say unto you, unless you turn from your sins and become as little children you shall not enter into the Kingdom.

A couple of young men in fine clothes on the edge of the crowd sniggered; a group of learned fathers frowned and murmured to one another; a Roman officer, standing apart in the shadow of a doorway, stroked his chin doubtfully; but the people in front moved back to make more room for the sick and the maimed who were still coming. They lay thick on the ground close round the feet of the man who was speaking, their desperate eyes fixed on his face, and some edged nearer, stretching out timid, withered hands as if longing fearfully to touch him. The hope



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in all those wasted faces was terrible to see. Could he heal them? Would he have pity on them? They were accursed, they were afflicted by the will of God but surely he would touch them and make them whole when he had done speaking. He was Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet, mighty in word and deed, and he loved them.

The great arc of the sky was ribboned now with streamers of burning gold, the light clouds floating high over the lake were the colour of flamingos' wings, the water gleamed like smouldering jewels and the afterglow of the sunset illumined his face.

Judge not, that ye be not judged, for with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged; and why do you look for the mote in your brother's eye but consider not the beam in your own eye?

Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.

What man is there among you, whom if his son ask bread will give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish will give him a scorpion? If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask him?

The white haunted face of a woman standing by the water's edge stared at him from the distance, spellbound; a wild, evil, beautiful face; the eyes were horror-struck. She was a dancer from Magdala, famed for her wickedness. Did he notice her?

He stood in the open doorway of the fisherman's house with his friends round him and his mother seated beside him. There was Simon Peter, the owner of the house, and his brother Andrew, and James and John the two stalwart sons of Zebedee. These four were fishermen, well known to many in the crowd, and there were Philip and

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Nathaniel from Cana and there were his own brothers who had come down with his mother from Nazareth. His mother sat on a chair just inside the door with Simon Peter's wife and her mother. And on the edge of the crowd men whispered among themselves.

He has come from the Jordan, said one. He is a disciple of John, that great man who has been put in prison. The son of Zebedee and Andrew the fisherman had gone to be baptized and found him there and followed him when John was put away, for he is preaching John's doctrine.

Is he not afraid then of the tetrarch?

No. The mantle of the Baptizer has fallen upon him. He is a prophet sent by God to proclaim the end of Herod's reign and the downfall of Cæsar.

When? How soon? Does he say when the Messiah will come?

No. But he says that the end of the world is near and that all who love God should rejoice for the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.

Do you believe?

Yes. He is a holy man of God. He heals the sick and loves the poor.

Every day he spoke to them glad comforting words about the Kingdom of Heaven and told them stories that they remembered long afterwards. One was about a sower who went out to sow seed for the harvest. Another was about seven foolish virgins who forgot to fill their lamps with oil on the eve of a wedding feast. All were parables that explained the wonderful Kingdom of God, and they listened even when they could not understand. And every evening when the sun was set they brought to him from Magdala and Emmaus and Tiberias and Bethsaida and from the towns on the far side of the lake all those who were diseased or crippled or tormented by evil spirits and

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he healed many of them. So many that his fame was already spread throughout all Galilee, and crowds besieged the house of the good fisherman day and night and followed him wherever he went.

Now they were waiting to see him perform new miracles. And though many already believed him to be a prophet, others hearing of his power as a healer had come to see for themselves and some, like the group of rich young men, had come out of idle curiosity, and some, like the learned rulers of the synagogue, had come filled with anxiety. For he was a stranger, he had appeared suddenly in their midst with no credentials, he acknowledged no sage as his master and was too young to have been ordained as a teacher. And they looked with suspicion on his powers of healing, for only the most venerable and holy rabbis had ever performed such miracles, in the power of God, but the country was full of sorcerers and necromancers who did such things by magic.

It was growing dark, the colours in the sky had faded, the shadow of night was creeping softly over the lake; lights shone from the windows of the house on the quay. How still it was. He had stopped speaking, he was looking down at the cripples on the ground. He moved forward. Which would he touch with his healing hands? The crowd held its breath.

Let us alone! The yell that broke the stillness was like the howl of a wild beast. What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?

The crowd shuddered, swayed and twisted. There was a convulsive struggle in the middle of it. Someone, something, was fighting its way through it. A woman screamed, the white-faced dancer of Magdala could have been seen flying down the quay toward the busy lighted bazaar. Men in the body of the crowd were engaged in a tussle.

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The madman flung them off and burst into the open space where the helpless sick lay waiting on their stretchers, and he crouched there before Jesus like an animal ready to spring, and yelled with laughter.

Art thou come to destroy us? he shouted. I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God, and he laughed again with foam dripping from his mouth.

Be quiet. Hold thy peace and come out of him.

They faced each other. The crowd huddled itself together and for a long moment the world seemed to hang suspended in breathless silence. Then those that were nearest saw the demoniac fall to the earth and saw the devil that was in him tear his victim, lift him up and fling him down as if to break him, and then all heard the terrible cry when the demon came out of him, leaving the man lying there like other men.

But no one could ever remember rightly how it came about. For when they saw the thing, many of the women fell to sobbing, and men began shouting, Praise be to God, and others started to sing, and some laughed and laughed and could not stop laughing, being out of their wits for amazement. And some of the young men would have carried Jesus on their shoulders through the streets of the town but he was gone into the house. So at last they all went away, taking the sick with them. But the elders of the synagogue were very troubled. They went away shaking their heads.

What thing is this? they said. What new doctrine is this? With authority he commands evil spirits and they obey him.

. . . . .

In Peter's house that night they talked in low voices, the three women sitting together at one end of the supper

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table, the men gathered round Jesus at the other. But Jesus himself said nothing. He was very pale. He seemed exhausted. There was a look of suffering in his eyes.

It is always so when he heals the sick or casts out demons, Peter's wife's mother whispered to Mary. The strength goes out of him.

He is eating nothing.

He is too weary to eat.

And too sad.

But why should he be sad? his own mother asked wondering.

I do not know. Andrew thinks it is because the people do not listen to his words and care only for miracles; but Peter says it's because he suffers himself with the suffering of each one whom he touches. When the leper came——

What leper?

Hush, he can hear us. I will tell you presently.

He bade them good-night when Peter had blessed the evening meal. The people were gone. He would go out, he said, and walk by the lake alone. No one must come with him.

But Peter, running to the door, tried to stop him. Dear Master, he said, go to your room and rest. The moon is rising over the lake. We have caught no fish to-day and we are going out now with the nets. Soon the shore will be bright as day. You will be seen and followed. A crowd will gather again. If you cannot sleep, come with us in the boats.

But he shook his head. No one will see me, Peter, he said. I need to be alone. And he went out by himself.

Poor Peter! His ruddy, impetuous face was very vexed and worried. He fumed as he got himself ready for the night's fishing. It is not good for the Master to go out, he grumbled. The night air on the shore is dangerous. He will catch a fever.

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And Andrew said, He is teaching in the synagogue of Tiberias to-morrow. He needs sleep.

And Peter's wife said, If he takes the road up onto the moors he may lose his way. There are wild beasts aprowl up there in the night.

But Peter's wife's mother, whom Jesus had cured of a fever, told them not to trouble their hearts about the Master. He knew better than they what he needed. If he wished to go alone by the lake or up on the moorland, he would be safe, never fear.

It was a strange thing to his mother, among much that was wonderfully strange, to hear these people talk of him. They called him Master; they spoke of him with awe and a timid, fearful tenderness.

She looked at her other sons. What, she wondered, did they think of it all? Their faces were blank; they were like men stupefied. There was a dull, obstinate expression in their eyes. Were they not glad that their brother was become a great healer and teacher? Couldn't they see that he was a master now with powers exceeding those of any rabbis who had ever come to Nazareth? Yet she herself was uneasy. For how could he be so changed? Whence came his power over demons? And how could he speak with authority when he had not even attended the college of the synagogue? She knew that he had filled his mind with the words of the prophets. She had always suspected that he spent many hours in prayer when he went out alone into the hills. But how could any man prepare himself alone to be a teacher of the Word of God? Solitary study was expressly forbidden. It led to heresy and was very dangerous.

Something had happened to him down in Judea. Something that had transformed him out of all knowledge. He did not talk now as he had talked to her in Nazareth.

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He spoke as one with profound and certain knowledge. Whence had come his wisdom? He had been baptized and afterwards he had gone alone into the wilderness, this much she knew. And Peter's wife's mother had told her that he had been alone in the desert with the wild beasts and had been tempted by Satan. Jesus had told Peter and James and John that he had been besieged there by great temptations. But what the temptations were she didn't know. Nor was this enough to explain the change in him. Nothing, she said to herself, that any man could tell her would be enough for that. And he himself told her nothing. He had scarcely spoken to her since she came and she dared not question him.

Her heart had been ready to burst with loving pride when she had met him at the wedding in Cana and seen for herself that he was become a great and honoured rabbi. She had questioned nothing then, nor had it seemed strange to her in the first flush of her joy, only very wonderful. Indeed, she had gone to meet him as a girl might go to meet her sweetheart, her heart beating fast in her breast and her cheeks pink with delight; and when she had found him at the festive gathering, surrounded by his new friends, she had been unable to conceal her mother's pride in him.

But now she felt lonely and frightened. How could she not have been frightened by the struggle between her son and the demon? She had seen the evil, malignant thing glaring out of the madman's eyes and had turned sick at the fearful sight. Then she had watched Jesus gather his strength together in an effort that made the sweat pour down his neck, had felt the power in him rush past her through the air like a wind and had known for an agonising instant that the awful issue hung in the balance. Suppose he had failed? He had not failed. But when it was done

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she had seen him twitching, as if in convulsions, and James had given a shuddering sigh like a sob and she had reached for James's hand, whispering, It is the awful power of God.

But now James's face was dark with doubt, and Joseph and Simon and Judah were whispering in a corner. What were they thinking? What were they saying? There was such a strange feeling in the room.

Everything was so strange. These good folk; she had never seen them before, yet Jesus was living with them as if he were in his own home and with his own family. She didn't even know where he had met Simon Peter and Andrew or how it was he had come to Capernaum instead of Nazareth, but it almost seemed as if he loved these men better than his own brothers.

Was he really her son? There were moments when she could scarcely believe it, and others when she knew it with agony. When he spoke to the people he had seemed to her like some glorious prince far removed from her little world; but afterwards at supper the lines on his face had made her wince with pain, and she had remembered with all her body how she had borne him in her arms and comforted him when, as a little child, he fell and hurt himself. What could she do for him now? Nothing. He wanted nothing from her. He took no account of her.

Everyone else was very kind. The good folk of the house treated her like a queen because she was his mother. He forgot her. He had looked at her down the table without seeing her. But she had seen pass in his eyes flashes of uncanny light that made her shudder.

I must not expect him to notice me, she said to herself. I must not trouble him or be anxious. But she wished he would give her one of his old, merry, loving looks and say some homely, intimate thing to her.



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If only she could have talked to him, if only she could have asked him some small question. She was sure some of his clothes needed washing and mending. If he had given her some worn garment, saying, Will you mend this for me, Mother? all would have been well, but even at the supper table he had seemed infinitely distant and, though the exhaustion in his face made her long to go to him and take him in her arms, she dared not approach him.

Then he had left them and now Joseph and Simon and Judah were gone to the house of Zebedee to sleep the night, and Peter's wife's mother was telling James of the leper as she swept up the crumbs from the supper table.

It was outside the synagogue. The Master had been preaching, and a leper came and fell on his face and worshipped him, crying out, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean, and the Master was moved with compassion and he put out his hand and touched him.

Touched him?

Yes, he touched him and said, I will. Be thou clean, and the man was made whole. Let us save this bread for to-morrow, daughter.

Do you know that this is true?

Yes.

Did you see it with your own eyes?

Yes, I saw him touch the leper.

And you have seen the man since?

But certainly. He was here this evening. He follows the Master everywhere.

But how do you know he is clean?

The Master charged him to show himself to the priest, and he did.

James leaned his great, shaggy head in his hands. His face was furrowed, his eyes were like the eyes of a dead man. The good women of the house seemed not to notice.

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They went on talking happily. They were to go in the morning to Tiberias to hear Jesus teach in the synagogue. It would be market day and there would be a great crowd of people. Jesus would start very early on foot with Peter and Andrew and any others who cared to go with him. The women would go in the donkey cart. They need not start, Peter's wife said, until the third hour.

The older woman lighted Mary to her room with a candle. Such a pleasant room with its windows looking out over the lake. You could see the moonlight on the water through the lattice. How lovely it was in this city by the lake! Coming down on it suddenly from the treeless moors, it had looked like Paradise with its palms and its flowers and its white synagogue by the blue water.

Capernaum is a beautiful place, Mary said, turning from the window. It is much warmer here than in Nazareth.

Her hostess smiled, putting down the candle. I have never been in the hill country. That, too, must be beautiful.

Yes, oh yes.

You are weary.

A little. The road was stony and swept by a dry wind. They looked into each other's eyes.

Mary said: You love my son?

He saved me, it may be from death, and he has shown me the way of eternal life.

Two women who had been strangers to one another until to-day, they stood in the little room of the fisherman's cottage and thought of the man who was out in the night.

He goes out alone to pray, the woman of Capernaum said, and Mary of Nazareth nodded:

I know. He would often do so when he was little more than a boy.

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She did not stay many days in Capernaum, but every morning she went with Peter's wife's mother to hear her son preach in some town or village, and every day some new wonderful thing happened, and every evening they brought the sick from all the country round and laid them at his feet. And though she didn't have many words with him, she became accustomed to the strange, crowded, pulsating life, so full of joy and suffering, heartbreaks and singing, laughter and tears; and his voice sounded through it all, comforting the people, talking to them quietly about themselves and the Kingdom of Heaven. And when he was alone with them in the house they would ask him, if he were not too exhausted, the meaning of the parables he had told the people, and even she plucked up her courage one night and questioned him. For he had said the Kingdom of Heaven was like a treasure hid in a field, and then he had said it was like a merchant seeking goodly pearls, and again it was like a net cast into the sea, and she couldn't understand. For she knew Heaven was a garden sixty times as big as the world with six hundred thousand angels at each gate, and four great rivers, one of milk, one of wine, one of honey and one of balsam. So she reminded him of this and said, How can it be like a net cast into the sea? And then he had laughed, just as he used to laugh when he was a boy, and they had all laughed at her, though she was sure they understood his meaning no better than she did. And she had been so glad to hear him laugh that she had forgotten all about the meaning of the parable.

But afterwards, when he had left them, they had all puzzled over the matter, and Peter's wife's mother said she did not think he was speaking of Paradise, but of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, and she said, I think he means that not all the Jews will be admitted, but only

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those who do what he commands. But his brothers had been offended at that. Who is he, they asked, that he should decide on the fate of men's souls? Does he put himself on an equality with God? One would think he saw himself on a throne in Heaven with Simon Peter, our host, standing guard at the gate.

That had distressed Mary very much. She knew he had meant nothing of the kind. She had wanted to tell Jesus how they misunderstood him, but she didn't rightly understand herself and she had no chance to speak to him alone.

So many people came to see him; people of all kinds and conditions, the very poor and the very rich, beggars, outcasts, noblemen from Herod's court, a Roman officer in shining uniform, a horrible man who was a tax collector, learned doctors of the law and many women. The women besieged him, followed him through the streets, sat at his feet and confessed their sins to him, great ladies and poor widows, divorced women and harlots, and there was a dancing-girl with a white haunted face who came every evening and stood staring afar off on the edge of the crowd, then disappeared.

James was horrified by the harlots and the tax gatherers. He was so scandalised by all the women who besieged the house that he shut himself up in his room and refused to come out, even to hear about the healing of the centurion's servant. And Joseph and Simon and Judah, when they heard of it, said:

Why should Jesus go out of his way to heal a Roman's slave? Why didn't he attend to his own people? As for the tax collector, he was a strange friend for one who professed to champion the poor.

But Peter had been angry at that. The centurion, he declared, was a good man who loved their nation and had built them a synagogue. His servant was dear to him.

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Would they have Jesus refuse to succour a dying man because he was a slave? As for Matthew, the son of Levi, who sat at the customs house, he had given up his calling for Jesus's sake, had put his fine house at his disposal and was giving a feast in the Master's honour. But that, Mary's sons declared, was an abominable thing. If Jesus took to feasting with tax-collectors and light women, his name would become infamous.

It was very difficult for Mary.

James, when he heard of the feast, wanted her to leave Capernaum at once. He had been white with rage.

Your son is no prophet, he said, he is a mad man. How can a man who is in his right mind profess to be a holy rabbi and sit down to feast with sinners?

He is sorry for them, James. He wants to help them.

Sorry for officers, nobles, rich tax collectors and lewd women?

She shuddered when she thought of the women. She said to herself, He is young. I must caution him, but to James she said, twisting her hands together:

I cannot explain. I do not rightly understand what he hopes to do. But I know he does not consort with these people for his own sake. They are all alike to him, and all unhappy.

Why does he drink and feast with them, then?

She could not answer.

But she would not leave, not yet. She was too troubled, too anxious, too puzzled. If only she could stay with him, she was persuaded that she would be able to help him; if in no other way, with the women. He must be protected from them. He didn't know how dangerous they were. She had seen the beautiful dancing-girl of Magdala weeping in the shadow of the house that evening, quite close to him, close enough to touch him. But when she had begged him

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to have nothing to do with the abandoned creature he had turned on her saying:

You do not understand. How is it you cannot understand? This woman will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven before all the rabbis.

And indeed she could not grasp his meaning. But she wanted to understand. And she wanted to believe in him for he was her son, yet not her son any longer.

When she sat with Peter's wife in the synagogue and saw him enthroned at the end of the hall with the venerable elders, a kind of terror would come over her as if she had never seen him before. His commanding presence, as he stood in the pulpit, seemed to her to be unearthly and his voice sounded in her ears like the very voice of Elijah.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.

Ten thousand times had she repeated those words and a thousand times had he said them when he was a child, standing by her knee, but never had she heard them spoken as she heard them now. And when he read from the prophets, he read with a power that had never been known in all the land.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak comfortably to Jerusalem and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high-way for our God.

Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and every hill shall be made low and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

There would be a stir in the congregation, a deep passionate breathing that was like a wind passing over the

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people. Women would sob aloud when he proclaimed his good news and explained to them about the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, and old men would wait at the door to take his hand and bless him for the message of hope he brought to the nation.

O Zion, that bringeth good tidings, get thee up into the high mountains. O Jerusalem, that bringeth good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid, say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God.

In every village and every town they would gather to hear him, and he would stand up before them and call to them with a voice that made their hearts beat quickly:

Incline your ear and come unto me. Hear and your soul shall live. Turn from your sins and believe the good news. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

And then he would tell them what they must do to enter into that kingdom. Not as their masters taught, quoting the rulers and maxims of the holy sages, did he teach them. Not even as John, that great and terrible man who proclaimed the dreadful day of judgment: but as one gloriously inspired, who rejoiced in the day that was dawning when peace and goodwill would reign over all the earth.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them I will liken him unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not shall be likened to a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house and it fell; and great was the fall thereof.

Mary would come away shaken, clinging to the arm of one of her sons, and James and John, those Sons of Thun-

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der as Jesus called them, would shoulder a way for her through the crowd, and she would go back with the women to Simon Peter's house, pondering over all that she had known concerning him since before he was born and she would hear again the voices in the crowd.

Who is he?

Whence does he come?

What power is this? What authority is this?

He was her son. Even if she could not understand him she would believe in him she told herself and she would not complain of being neglected.

And yet she hoped every day for a word with him, an hour's quiet; and she would wait for him at her upper window, looking out over the blue lake that was dotted with white sails. And, listening to the voices of fishermen mending their nets, she would remember how, when he was a child, she would go to the door and look out to see if he were coming. She would always go too soon. She would have to wait, and she would stand in the door waiting. Indeed, for some time before he was due home from school, she would feel the urgent longing for the sight of him pulling her to the door, until, no matter what she was doing, she would stop, go to the door, and find herself looking for him, looking with all her being, and she would see him at last coming up the street with the sun streaming behind his small, slight figure. Always, ever since he was born, had she looked at him, looked and looked and never had enough of looking to satisfy her eyes. When they sat together reading the scriptures, when they walked together in the fields it was always the same. She could see again the curve of his round cheek, his pointed shoulder-blades and thin little shoulders. How proudly he had walked as a little boy. It was as if she had never taken her eyes from his face all the hours of all the years they had



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spent together. But now she did not know him. She would even ask her own heart who he was.

Was he Elijah come again?

She had believed that God had destined him to be a holy rabbi. She had been mistaken, he was more than a rabbi. But who was he? What was he? She did not know.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and give you peace.

He had closed the service with the beautiful, familiar words. This man was her son. She could not get near him, but she must not be lonely or afraid for him. She must thank God for the great mystery and be glad.

## Chapter Six

**S**HE HAD promised to come to Nazareth and she had had to leave him with that promise to comfort her.

Her sons had been eager to get home. Not only James, but the others had urged and fretted her to be gone. What good were they doing here, they asked her? They had their work to attend to and their families. What would their wives think of them if they stayed idling away the days on the sultry shores of the lake? They had seen their brother perform miracles and heard him preach; now they must look to their own affairs.

She begged them to let her stay a day or two longer, so Judah had agreed to wait for her and the others had gone on ahead. They, being strong men, could do the long, hot, uphill journey in a day, but she, even on her donkey, would take two days to get home and would have to sleep on the way.

And now the wonderful visit, so crowded with strange happenings and stranger emotions, had come to an end. Lovely Capernaum lay behind her and Bethsaida and Magdala and Tiberias, under its naked black hill with its citadel and royal palace, its forum and its synagogue; all the teeming cities that ringed the sunny lake, with their fleets of fishing-boats and their shipyards and their happy, kindly, childlike people who had received her son Jesus and believed his teaching, it had all dropped away and he was lost to her down there in the valley. But only

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for a little time, she said to herself. He would soon be coming home; and they had had, after all, one lovely day together.

She hugged the memory to her as she climbed the rough road onto the moors under the blazing sun with Judah leading her donkey, and she talked of it to Judah, wanting to know that he too enjoyed the day on the lake.

It was lovely, wasn't it, Judah?

Hum. Judah was puffing and panting up the mountain. He was too out of breath to say much.

Did you ever see water so blue? It sparkled like diamonds in the sun. And Jesus seemed so like his old self, didn't he? Poking fun at Peter and saying he'd make him a fisher of men. I wonder what he meant. What do you think he meant, Judah?

Don't know, Mother. Never do know what he means by any of his sayings. He talks in riddles.

But I did enjoy our picnic supper on the shore, didn't you? Andrew broiled the fish beautifully; and the little dell with the stream hidden in maidenhair fern, how lovely it was! Do say you thought it nice, Judah!

I'd think it nice if it were on this road.

Poor Jude! Let us rest awhile.

No, Mother, better push on. We've come no distance and it's nearly midday.

She looked back, shading her eyes from the glare. She could see the lake spread out far below and the opposite shore rising to the hills, and the snowy peak of Mount Hermon in the distance, but she could not see Capernaum. It was hidden under the cliff.

How kind they had been to her! It was many years since she had gone on a visit. Never had she been such an honoured guest in any house. The mother of a prophet! How strange that would sound if she said it aloud. What

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would Judah think of her? She smiled, seeing herself as she must appear to the caravans they passed: just an old woman on a donkey, climbing the bare hills in the hot sun.

When he came to Nazareth, he would come back triumphant. All their friends would gather to welcome him and the tongues of the wicked people who had willed to do him harm would be silenced. They'd be put to shame, all those women, who whispered together at the fountain. He would sit with the elders in the synagogue, and the Master of Nazareth would ask him to read from the Prophets and he would stand up before them all.

The rabbi will surely ask Jesus to take the service on the sabbath, won't he, Judah?

What rabbi?

The Rabbi of Nazareth.

Don't know, I'm sure.

But surely, Judah, now that his fame has spread throughout the country they will want to hear him.

They'll want miracles. That's what they'll want, and many of them. If he doesn't do miracles, mark my words, they won't listen to him.

But, Jude, you speak so strangely. Of course he will heal the sick in Nazareth just as he did in Capernaum. He will heal them because he is compassionate. You speak as if he did it to impress the people.

I'm not sure he doesn't.

Oh Jude!

It was very difficult for her to talk to Judah after that. Indeed she found when she got home that it was no easier to talk to her sons about their elder brother now that he was suddenly become a great man than it had been before, and she was bitterly disappointed.

How was it that they didn't share her feeling of joy

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and triumph? They had seen what she had seen and heard what she had heard and yet it was almost as if they didn't want him to come home. She had hoped secretly that James would relax his rigid principles for this one great occasion and allow her to have a feast of welcome for Jesus. All the way back across the desolate, forbidding moors, strewn with rocks of black basalt and lava and pumice stone that took on such frightening shapes when night began to fall, she had planned how she would decorate the house. She would make it beautiful as she used to do for feast days when her husband was alive. I will light candles, she said to herself, many candles, and festoon all the doors with branches of myrtle and sumac and arbutus, and I'll send the children out to gather great armfuls of wild roses and we'll invite all the neighbours, perhaps even the master. He must have heard by now all about Jesus, and he is sure to be glad for he is a good man. But James, when very timidly she put the matter to him, said, No, there would be no heathenish feast in that house as long as he was head of it; and Joseph and Simon and Judah, although they were often irked by James's severity, supported him in this instance. Indeed, no one in the house seemed in the least overjoyed at the thought of Jesus's home-coming, except the children.

She didn't understand her family. It couldn't occur to her that they were jealous. She was a woman, unacquainted with evil, who believed with a complete simplicity in the love of God and the sincerity of men. And these were her sons. She couldn't suspect them of being small, mean-minded men, too absorbed in their own little affairs to be interested in their brother's life. She herself had been troubled by much that she had seen, but there was no doubt in her mind that her son spoke the truth when he told the people that unless they turned to God

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with their whole hearts they would perish. And she said to herself, even if they did not believe him to be a prophet, he was their brother. They had seen, as she had seen, that he was determined to give his life to saving the people. They had witnessed his exhaustion, his passionate pity for all those who came to him for help, the pathos of his heroic struggle. How then could they refuse him, their own brother, the loyal support he had a right to expect from his family? Their father would have stood by Jesus like a rock. She knew Joseph would not have tolerated their attitude. She was so distressed by it that for once she forgot the rules of decency that bade a woman be silent, and taxed them with lack of family affection. But she bitterly regretted her indiscretion, for, instead of protesting their brotherly love, they answered her with sullen, obstinate faces and words that horrified her.

He had shaken the dust of this house from his feet, why then should they welcome him back with music and feasting?

And how were they going to carry on with their normal pursuits, if he filled all the house and courtyard with the lame, the halt and the blind?

It was not as if they were rich nobles or tax collectors or fishermen who could laze away the day in the sun like lizards. They had to work to keep the wolf from the door.

She felt, as she listened to them, as if they were stabbing her ears with knives, and, in her pain, she saw them for a moment exactly as they were, small, self-satisfied, ignorant men, who wanted to live their little lives undisturbed by any sense of the everlasting mystery that lay behind the appearance of the fleeting days; and she could have defied them in that moment, she might even have left them and gone to join Jesus in his wandering life

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among the poor and the wretched, had James not frightened her, put doubts into her mind, reminded her of the things she herself had disliked about Jesus's life in Capernaum. For James was not mean or resentful; he wasn't troubled at the thought of the nuisance involved in having Jesus in the house; he was as earnest in his pursuit of the truth as Jesus himself, and he followed the way of holiness with a much greater austerity.

Moreover, though he was very wearisome with his constant hectoring and lecturing and quoting of the rabbis, and a trial to look at in his holy dirtiness, his way was the way laid down by the Church and she dared not compare him with his radiant brother who was beloved of his followers. For she knew, as James pointed out, that a rabbi should not be beloved. He must be feared and obeyed and revered even more than a man's earthly parents, but he must not be loved. If he was, it was a sign that he was not doing his duty.

And James followed the precepts of the rabbis faithfully. He made himself unpleasing to men for the sake of holiness, and if sometimes he longed to join with the family in easy talk, he never gave in to the longing nor ever discussed at the supper table any topic but the Word of God. So how could she not respect his opinion? Indeed, ever since she left Capernaum she had been secretly tormented by the fear of what he would do. Would his love for his brother be stronger than his principles? Would he recognise that Jesus was filled with the spirit of God even if he did not keep the letter of God's law? She didn't know. All the way home, underneath her joy, had run a tremor of apprehension, and when she went to find him in the upper room, where he spent his nights in study, her knees shook under her.

He faced her mournfully with his books spread out on

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the table and a great roll of parchment in front of him. He was writing something with a quill pen that spluttered with ink and there was ink on his fingers and the rims of his eyes were red.

Are you very busy, James?

Yes, Mother.

Can I talk to you a moment?

If it is a matter more urgent than what I am doing.

What is it that you are doing?

I am writing down what I learned to-day in the college. My memory is troublesome. I cannot remember unless I write down carefully what I have heard. It concerns the thirteen exegetical principles by which the Law is expounded. The inference from minor to major. The inference from a similarity of phrase. A general law may be derived by induction from different cases which, occurring in the same or different verses, have got some feature in common. That is the third principle. It is as far as I've got. There are thirteen. Without them one cannot interpret the Law. What is it, Mother? He passed his great inky hand over his forehead.

I want to speak to you, James, she said, timidly, about Jesus.

Do not speak of him, Mother. It is better for us not to discuss him.

But he is coming home, and his brothers are not glad to welcome him.

Nor am I. I would he were not coming.

But, James, he is your brother.

Yes, and my father's son.

I don't understand you. Why do you speak as if you wished he was no kindred of yours?

Because he will bring sorrow on us all, Mother, and disgrace to his father's name.



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James! How can you say such a thing? Why, he is already a famous rabbi. All the world is flocking to him. And you yourself heard him and know that he is full of wisdom.

Famous he may be, but not wise with the wisdom of holy men. How can he be? He is only thirty years old. You are blinded, Mother, by your love of him.

Indeed I am not, James. There are many things about his life that trouble me. I know that he is beset by great temptations and I know that he is very young and ignorant.

But you think he can do no wrong, even when he fails to keep the holy command that bids him honour you, his own mother.

Her face quivered.

You are cruel, James.

I, cruel? Is it I who have neglected and abandoned you? I tell you, Mother, the adoration of the crowd has gone to his head like strong drink. He thinks himself appointed by God to such a great work that he need no longer consider his family or even obey God's holy commandments. Why, if he is a man of God, does he defy our laws? What has a prophet to do with loose women or a divine healer to do with drunkards? Is that his way of getting ready for the last judgment and the Kingdom of Heaven? He calls on men to repent of their sins, then feasts with sinners. I tell you, Mother, he has been led astray and he will lead everyone astray who listens to him.

She twisted her hands together and her eyes besought this terrible son to have pity on her.

I do not understand him, she whispered. I confess that his conduct frightens me. But I know that he is wonderful and I know he loves God.

It is useless for us to discuss him, Mother.

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He turned again to his writing and began muttering as he wrote. Four. A general proposition followed by the enumeration of particulars already comprehended in the general proposition, in which case the scope of the particulars—no, the scope of the proposition—is limited by the things specified.

She listened awhile to his scratching pen. But she could not bear to leave the question of Jesus's home-coming unsettled, and she searched desperately in her mind and heart for something to say about him that would convince his brother, but she could think of nothing save what James himself had seen, so she said timidly:

There are his miracles. You cannot deny his miracles.

Certainly he performs miracles. So do wizards and sorcerers.

James! Her face went grey as death. Do you mean that you believe your brother——?

No. No, I do not say that he is false or his power evil. I only say that he is making use of powers that he does not understand. You know as well as I do that only the most holy rabbis can exorcise demons with impunity. You saw yourself the great shuddering and twitching that seized him that night at Capernaum, and his face afterwards. It was for the moment like the face of an idiot and there was froth on his twitching lips.

No, James, no! There was no froth. There was not.

But she was almost too frightened to speak. Behind the words of her son other words sounded, the awful words of the Law that she had known since earliest childhood.

There shall not be found among you any that useth divination or an observer of times or an enchanter or a witch or a charmer or a wizard or a necromancer, for all these things are an abomination unto the Lord.

A terrible feeling came over her, a dreadful, over-

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whelming premonition of calamity. She had had something faintly similar before, but never like this.

Mother, what is it? Why do you stare so? Your eyes, what do you see with your eyes?

She didn't hear. She was seeing her son again when he cast out the demon and she was listening to the awful voice of God.

If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams and giveth a sign or a wonder and he say, Let us go after other gods, that prophet or dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God.

Other gods? That was what James meant. But it was not true. It couldn't be true.

If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son or thy friend which is as thine own soul, entice thee, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, thou shalt surely kill him. Thine hand shall be the first upon him to put him to death and afterwards the hand of all the people, and thou shalt stone him with stones till he die.

And she had seen a man stoned in Nazareth.

Mother, what is it? Can't you hear me?

She shook her head, unable to speak, the chords in her withered throat twisted.

Does the rabbi agree with you, James? she managed at last to whisper.

I don't know.

She fled from James. She avoided him and his brothers, and night after night she went up on to the roof to pray to God to preserve her son.

But he was coming home. He might arrive any day. He would expect a welcome. He would come, all on fire, with his glorious message, ready and eager to tell it to his own people. Suppose they refused to hear him? She dared

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not go to the rabbi, but she must speak to someone. At last she sought out her husband's brother, Clophas, and his wife Mary, who was like her own sister; for it came to her that they loved Jesus more truly than did his own brothers. And she asked Clophas, though it was hard for her to ask the question, whether the master of the synagogue had said anything in his hearing about Jesus.

No, he had not talked to the rabbi about Jesus. He had not heard anything definite, but he knew the rulers of the synagogue had heard accounts of her son's miracles and were debating in their minds how they would receive him.

And I am afraid, he said to her, that they are not of one mind in the matter.

You mean that they are against him? What is it, Clophas? Oh, what is it? What do they say?

He spoke kindly. They say that he teaches strange doctrine, and some say that he is too young and too ignorant to be allowed to teach the people. But others say he is a brave man to take up John the Baptizer's gospel.

You think they will not ask him to preach in the synagogue?

I think they will ask him out of curiosity, as they always ask any famous preacher.

Then all will be well. She smiled. He would have been so disappointed, she said, with a sigh of relief.

But Clophas's face remained serious.

You know the people of this town, he warned her. They are not like the easy-going folk in the valley. They are hill people, proud, hot-headed, passionate, easily swayed but easily angered, and you know how outspoken Jesus is.

Oh, but if they once hear him, I am sure they will believe. He is so wonderful, Clophas, when he stands be-

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fore the people. And his voice——. You cannot know till you have heard him. You have no need to dread his coming.

It is only for you, Mary. We long to see Jesus again. As for young Simon here, he is going about among the young men stirring them to great enthusiasm for his cousin.

And Susannah, put in his wife, is keeping her new dress to wear on the great day when he shall preach. And old Anna is all for going off down the mountain with a crowd of youngsters to meet him.

So Mary was comforted. She told herself that there were many people in the town who loved Jesus and would be glad to see him again, and the memory of her awful premonition faded. It had been as if doors had opened on an immense darkness and as if she had penetrated that darkness for an instant of time, but the vision hadn't lasted, the doors were closed again and now she was back in her small familiar world where the days followed each other tranquilly, much as they had always done.

And no one told her how Nathan the town-clerk and his wife Rachel were spreading tales in the town damaging to Jesus. Rachel had got hold of the story of the red-haired dancer who followed Jesus everywhere; and Nathan was pointing out, very painstakingly, how Jesus, in performing miracles, favoured the enemies of his race. Whom had he healed? The servant of a Roman centurion and the son of a Greek nobleman. Nathan had it all at his finger-tips: the feast in the house of Matthew, the tax collector, everything; and he was very busy recounting it, and he would ask his listeners whether such conduct wasn't typical of the man? Had the carpenter ever been true to his own race? Never. As for his having power over demons, he, Nathan, didn't believe it. Hadn't they known him all his life? If he wanted his own townsfolk to believe

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in him, let him come and show what he could do. They'd give him a hearing and a chance to prove his powers. There were plenty of blind beggars and demoniacs and other accursed folk in Nazareth.

Mary, luckily for her peace of mind, didn't know of this; and when finally after some days the rabbi came and talked to her very kindly, saying Jesus must surely speak to the people in the synagogue, she said to James, with a look of timid, childish triumph:

Now, James, you see. And even James after that seemed so much less gloomy that she gathered her courage together and said to him, You will be good to him, James, when he comes, won't you? You'll stand by him for my sake.

And James said:

I'll stand by you, Mother, and I will do nothing to make things more difficult for him. That much I can promise you.

And so at last he came, arriving one evening on foot at the great gate of the city; and no one noticed him. For there was a great crowd pouring through the gate. It was summer: the fields were white with harvest, the grapes were swelling in the vineyards and all the country was humming with the song of birds and the drone of honey bees. The labourers were coming home from the fields, travellers were entering the city for the night, and Jesus, threading his way past the camel caravans and the long procession of laden asses, looked like any other dusty, foot-sore traveller. Moreover, the old men who sat talking at the gate, were engaged in one of their heated debates concerning the advent of the Messiah. And some were saying, while they watched the throng with heavy-lidded, scornful eyes, that the time predicted for the coming of the Messiah was expired: and others held that it

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was imminent: while others again argued that the end of the world must come first and all the dead rise from their graves. But that, the most learned said, was not scriptural. It was written that a king of the house of David should arise who would deliver the Jews from their oppressors and become ruler of the whole world. How could he be king of the world, if the world were already destroyed?

He would be king, said the others, of a new world, a world in which the lives of men would be prolonged for centuries, and wheat would grow on Lebanon as high as palm trees, and every cluster of grapes would contain thirty jars of wine.

But no, declared those grey-beards most learned in the tradition, the world is to stand six thousand years, there are to be two thousand years of confusion, two thousand years of the reign of the Law and then, and only then, two thousand years of the days of the Messiah.

Though they admitted that some holy rabbi said there were first to be wars of the Dragon and of Gog and Magog, and that God would not renew the earth until seven thousand years had been completed.

As for the length of the reign of the Messiah, the best opinions were again divided. Some said forty years, some seventy, some three generations and some that he would continue as long as from the creation of the world up to the present time, namely, three thousand, three hundred and thirty years. The exact time was questionable, like the belief that men in those days would be two ells high, but all the best authorities were agreed that even if the Messiah himself should die, his kingdom would descend to his son and his grandson. And Jesus passed them on his way home while they were debating this weighty question.

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What happened to him during the days that followed is common knowledge. The disappointment of it, the failure, his helplessness in the face of their disbelief and his anger; it was all told throughout the world and written down after his death that all the world might read. And though Nazareth, the town where he was brought up, has so completely disappeared that some scholars doubt now whether the place ever existed, the story of how his own people turned him out will never be erased from the minds of men, nor ever be disbelieved for so long as there are those alive who love him.

For it was not only true, it had to be true. The whole tragic business was inevitable from the beginning, and his bitter words about a prophet having no honour in his own country and among his own kin and in his own house, were a simple statement of fact, so true to the experience of ordinary men that his saying has become a household word and almost no one who uses it remembers that it was wrung from Jesus of Nazareth because of the way his own family treated him. Nor does anyone stop nowadays to think how that little white-washed house in a provincial town in Syria once received under its roof a man who gave his life for love of his fellow men and became identical with God to many millions of men throughout the world. Nor do many men like to think of how his brothers were ashamed of him and jealous, or how his mother was torn and racked between her sons and could not believe in him in face of their disbelief. For she became known in time as the Mother of God, and shrines were built to her all over the world, and many candles, millions and millions of candles, still burn day and night in her many shrines. But the people who kneel before her image do not think of her as she was, a poor woman like other poor women, a devout Jewess who hated idolatry, but who would



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have been glad at this time to light candles in her little house at a feast of welcome for her dear son, yet could not.

She did not know, she could not know, what was coming. His brothers hadn't a notion. They were too busy with their own little affairs to give his future a thought. Did he himself know? Did he realise? When he stood up in the synagogue where he had gone with his mother every sabbath day for nearly thirty years and the beadle gave him the book of the prophet Isaiah, he was undoubtedly labouring under a great strain, he must have been, but it was not the weight of the future that oppressed him then, it was the awful sense of the present. For he knew men and he knew what was in the minds of the people who had come to look at him. Ordinary people, decent, dull, respectable people of a small provincial town; honourable, brave and not mercenary, nor vicious, nor degenerate, with a strain of poetry in them and a sense for invisible things: but ordinary human beings for all that, selfish and self-satisfied and self-righteous and mean and spiteful and capable of hatred and lust and deceit. There were plenty of secret adulterers among them and scandal-mongers and hypocrites and whiners and naggers and shrews and scolds and drunkards and thieves and liars, as there are in any concourse of people; and he had given himself the task of setting them free from all those vile things, and he knew them for what they were. Indeed, although most of the congregation were strangers to him, he knew them better than any people in the world, for he had been brought up among them and he was one of them, a provincial Jew of the town of Nazareth.

He felt, as he faced them, the antagonism of some, the curiosity of others and the nervous solicitude of the few who were his friends. He could see his mother's worn,

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wasted face with its wide, haunted, childlike eyes; and on the other side of the hall he felt the gloomy eyes of his brother James fixed on him and saw the sullen, self-conscious, half-ashamed faces of his other brothers. All his childhood was there with him like a thick hedge to blind and distract him, but he did not allow it to distract or oppress him. He opened the book and he found the place and he began to read.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because he has appointed me to preach glad tidings to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book and he gave it to the beadle and sat down, and all the eyes of the congregation were fastened on him, and he began to speak to them saying, This day is this writing fulfilled in your ears.

He had been able to do no great miracles in Nazareth. He had performed no mighty work and he had only laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them. Over the blind men and the lepers and the demoniacs they had brought him in his own house he had had no power. He had failed and his family and all the people had seen his failure. Nevertheless, he faced them in the synagogue undaunted and told them that he was the prophet foretold in their holy scriptures who had come to give sight to the blind, champion the poor, comfort the broken-hearted and set free all those who were slaves. And while he was speaking, though they did not understand him and took him literally, they listened enthralled, such was the magic of his voice and the commanding power of his presence; and many in their amazement nudged each other and whispered:

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Who is he? Whence has this man this wisdom and these mighty words?

And some who had seen him in the old days recognised him and said:

Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?

And when he had finished talking to them, a great buzzing broke out and everyone started whispering saying:

It is the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Simon and Judah. His sisters are here with us. And they felt they had been tricked, for they had taken him to be a great prophet, and he was only Jesus, the builder who repaired their barns.

And then one and another got up to question him, as was their custom when a speaker had finished his discourse, and their questions were barbed shafts meant to sting him, for these were Nathan's friends and they had prepared their questions beforehand, and they said:

Should a man who expounds the Law before all the people consider himself privileged to break the Law?

Is it not forbidden to sit down to meat in the house of a heathen?

And they began to taunt him with what he had done in Capernaum. If he could cast out demons by the lake of Galilee, why could he not do the same here? Was the air less salubrious in Nazareth than Capernaum?

And someone called out:

Look how pale he is! He is sick unto death. Heal thyself, oh great and mighty physician!

But another shouted:

He can only heal the slaves of idolaters and the sons of noblemen.

And then Jesus grew angry and he rose again before

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them all and looked at them and his look quelled them to silence and he said:

There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elias when the heaven was shut up three years and six months when great famine was throughout the land, but unto none was Elias sent save unto Sarepta in Sidon, unto a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elias the prophet, and none of them were cleansed saving Naaman, the Syrian.

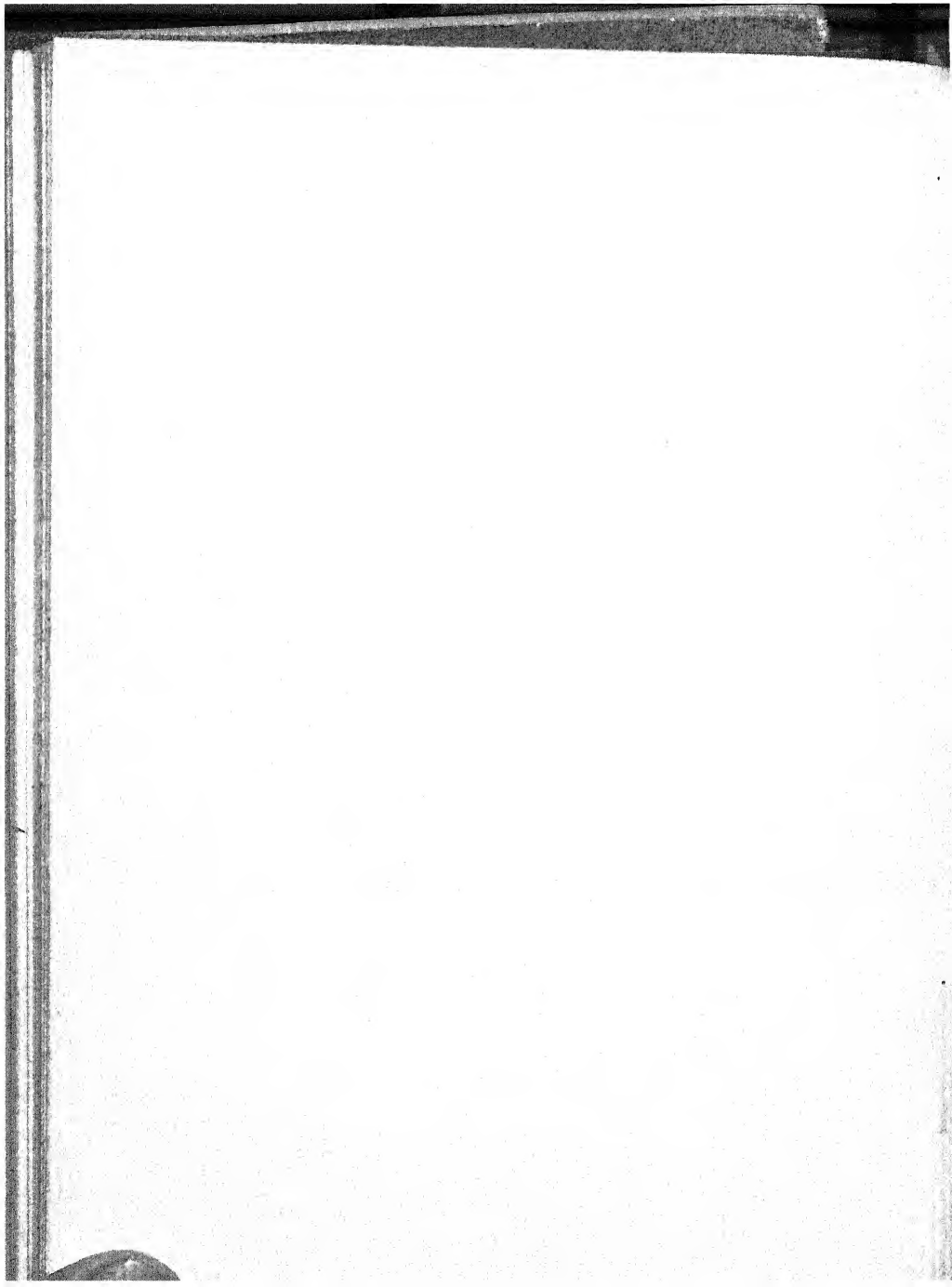
And all the people in the synagogue when they heard this were filled with wrath for they knew what he meant, and they surged toward him shouting, Traitor! Beguiler! Son of Samael! and they flung him out of the synagogue, and the rabbi and elders could not control them, for they cried:

He has insulted us! He is not with us but against us! He is in the pay of Cæsar!

And they thrust him out of the city, dragging him through the city gate and hustling and beating him, and they took him to the brow of the hill to the south of the town where the road skirts the cliffs, meaning to cast him down headlong, but he passed through the midst of them and went his way.



## Part Two





## Chapter One

**W**ITH what materials may the sabbath lamp be lighted, and with what may it not be lighted? It may not be lighted with cedar bast nor with uncombed flax nor with floss silk, nor with willow fibre nor with nettle fibre nor with water weeds.

Say it after me, children. Joseph, Jude, pay attention. If you play with your toes and do not listen, you will never learn the lesson, and your uncle James will be very angry.

With what materials may the sabbath lamp be lighted and with what may it not be lighted? It may not be lighted with cedar bast nor with uncombed flax—say it, children.

She sat near the door of the inner room with the little boys at her feet.

She was weary unto death, so weary that she could scarcely see out of her eyes. She repeated the words automatically in a high, thin, monotonous voice that threatened every now and then to rise to a squealing scream. She was teaching her grandchildren their daily lesson in the holy tradition that was to rule their lives. Every morning she taught them and every evening James had them repeat to him what they had learnt. But they seemed unable to learn by heart the rules for the lighting of the sabbath lamp, and though she had kept all the rules year after year, year after year, she was unable to teach them to the children. It was midsummer, the air was heavy with heat and she was sick with weariness.



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She could not stop thinking of Jesus. All day in the stifling rooms where she moved about automatically doing the little tasks she was given to do by her sons and her sons' wives, she thought of him; and all the long sleepless night, prostrate on the roof under the stars or turning restlessly on her pallet, she went over again and again the dreadful heart-breaking humiliation of his failure; and she could understand nothing. He had come home a great teacher and healer, with his fame gone before him, and he had been driven out, branded as an impostor, for he had failed both as teacher and healer. There in the courtyard where the pigeons were drowsily cooing and the family goat crouched in the shade of the wall, before her very eyes and the eyes of his brothers and sisters, before all the neighbours and the learned men of the synagogue, he had told Elisha, the lame goldsmith, to rise and walk; and Elisha had struggled to his feet, dropped his crutches, stood tottering a moment, then had fallen with a loud cry to the ground. Just there. She could see the spot from where she sat.

She had covered her face when the man fell. The very air had shuddered and the neighbours had made a great sighing sound all together. Their pent breath had whistled through their teeth like a hiss, and then Nathan, the clerk, had burst into high, cackling, derisive laughter. And when she had looked again, there was Jesus standing facing them all, with great bewilderment and disappointment on his face and Elisha moaning at his feet. But he had not been ashamed. Indeed, he had looked down an instant later at the lame man with a strange, proud compassion and had seemed unaware of anyone else.

They had carried Elisha away and many would have gone after him to console with him had it not been for Nathan, who cried out:

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Stay, friends, stay! Let the carpenter try again. Here is Abraham the blind beggar whom you have all seen sitting by the gate; and Reuben, the lunatic son of Moses, the market-gardener; maybe he will avail with these.

And so they had all come crowding back, craning their necks again.

But Jesus had said:

Nathan, you must not tempt God. I do nothing of myself but by the power of Him that hath sent me. And his face had been stern as he said it and his eyes terrible to see.

And at that they had all begun to murmur among themselves, asking, What does he mean? Does he speak of his Master, John the Baptizer?

But Abraham, the blind man, who had always been one of Jesus's friends, besought him in a broken voice.

I have waited long for your home-coming, O Jesus! If indeed you are sent by God, restore my sight for friendship's sake.

And Jesus had been moved for his friend and had touched his eyes with his hands. But it was of no avail. He could do nothing, and he himself said it.

I can do nothing, he said.

She could see again all the faces of the people who were watching. Susannah, the wife of Solomon the miller, had gone red as a peony, her eyes were filled with tears; old Anna was frowning and glaring at everyone and muttering; the long face of Rachel, the wife of Nathan, wore a smile of spiteful triumph. Indeed, most of those present had seemed as pleased as people are after eating of some rich satisfying dish. It was almost as if they smacked their lips over Jesus's failure and cared nothing for the blind beggar's disappointment. They began to go away chattering and nodding at each other, and saying, Did we not tell you how it would be?

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But others shook their heads muttering angrily: What foolery is this? And others, again, pulled long faces, saying: What humiliation for his family. Why did his brothers not prevent him from making such a spectacle of himself?

And even her own husband's brother and her sister-in-law had looked at her with pity and made as if to go out of kindness, not wanting to witness her bitter mortification. But the face of Simon, their son, had stood out from all the others' faces in the crowd. Such a fine fiery lad he was, such a passionate patriot and such a true friend to Jesus. He of all others had longed to see Jesus again and had had faith in him: now his young, ardent face wore a look of utter consternation and his eyes seemed to be starting from their sockets with horror. But when they all began to move away he did not budge from his place, and his sensitive mouth was grim.

All the others would have gone if it had not been for little Naomi, the crippled daughter of Joshua the blacksmith. She had been lying the while in her father's arms, and now when the people were going away she wriggled out of them with such yearning love on her little wasted countenance as never was seen and she dragged her slight body along the ground till she was close to Jesus, where he stood alone by himself, and she reached for his hand and said, looking up with a smile:

Do not be troubled, dear Master Jesus.

And at the sound of the young, loving voice, all the stern sorrow melted from his face, and he said:

Child, unless you have faith I can do nothing. Do you want to be healed and be strong again?

And she answered: Yes, oh yes. But you are my friend always.

And then he said, Little girl, get up.

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And though she had not stood on her feet since she was a toddling child, she had got up and stood nestling against him quietly, smiling as if it were the most natural thing in the world. And at that her father the blacksmith, who had always been a drunkard and a rough man, had burst into great sobs.

But most of the people had gone by then, and those who remained, were dissatisfied. If he could heal the child, why, they said, could he not heal the goldsmith and blind Abraham? Perhaps the child was not really a cripple at all, but just a sickly creature, terrified of her drunken father.

Children, O children, I pray you pay attention. You have forgotten all you learned yesterday. Come let us repeat again: With what materials may the sabbath lamp be lighted and with what may it not be lighted? Say it without me this time.

The evening meal, when all the people had gone, had been terrible. The family had eaten it in silence, their eyes on their plates. No one had looked at Jesus or spoken to him and, when after James had said the blessing, the children had started to climb into Jesus's lap asking for a story, their mothers had cried out:

No, you shall not. Let our little ones alone! and had dragged them away from him; and Jude's wife had boxed little Jude's ears because he wailed aloud. And indeed all the children had started wailing and there had been such a sobbing and scolding in the house that she could not bear it. She had started to weep herself and had cried:

Why do you do this? Oh, why do you do this? How can he harm the children?

And her daughters-in-law had turned on her then and one had been so uncivil that her husband had shouted at her to be quiet. And then they had all fallen to quarrel-

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ling and the children to screaming; and Jesus, who had said nothing when his little friends had been snatched away from him, had got up and gone out of the house.

She had meant to talk to him. She had wanted to tell him—But what had she wanted to say to him? She couldn't remember. Had she meant to tell him that she still believed in him, or had she meant to beg him not to go to the synagogue on the morrow? Perhaps had she done that, she might have prevailed on him and saved him from that second final ignominy. But he hadn't come. She had waited and waited long after all the others had gone to rest and at last she had fallen asleep on her chair, and it was James who found her there at dawn with the lamp gone out and her head on the table and took her to her bed and tried to console her saying:

He is gone, Mother. Don't be anxious. He will not come back. He will never venture now to appear in the synagogue.

And when she had wept anew at his words, James, who was usually so stern, had been kind to her and sat by her side, stroking her hand, and at last he had said:

Is your heart so set on your eldest son, that your other sons are no good to you?

And at that she had been very sorry for loving Jesus so much more than this haggard, forbidding, unlovely man.

But James had been wrong. They had all been wrong and they had all been helpless to prevent what happened. Jesus had come in when they were breaking their fast, his face shining like the sunrise, and had sat down as if nothing untoward had occurred and had eaten his bread and milk like a hungry boy, and nothing that any of them said to him could shake him from his purpose. He would go to the synagogue: he must speak to the people. He had a

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message to deliver and he must deliver it to all who would listen.

And they had driven him out. He had been hunted out of the town like a dangerous beast. One minute he had been standing there in the pulpit glorious as a prince, his wonderful voice filling all the building with its compelling power, the next they were on his heels like a pack of hungry dogs. Why, oh why, had he angered them so? Why need he have said that about Naaman, the captain of the hosts of Syria? If he loved his people and was anxious for them, why did he tell them that they would be shut out of their own kingdom and the Syrian idolaters put in their place? What good would it do now for her nephew Simon to protest that he was a patriot ready to die for Israel? He had turned publicly against them and some said he had claimed to be Elias himself. Had he done that? She couldn't remember. She only remembered that someone had called out, Traitor, and another, Blasphemer, and then suddenly there had been an uproar. All the men in the congregation had surged toward him with lifted arms. She had had a vision of a wild sea of waving hands and his face in the distance. Then she had found herself alone with her sister in the empty synagogue.

What a noise the pigeons were making!

Now children, the next sentence.

It may also not be lighted with pitch, nor with liquid wax, nor with oil made from the seeds of the cotton plant, nor with oil which having been set apart as a sin offering and having been defiled, is condemned to be destroyed by burning, nor with the fat from the tails of sheep, nor with tallow. Naaman, the Mede, says one may use tallow when it has been boiled, but the other sages say that whether so prepared or not, it may not be used.

No, Jude, I have never used tallow.

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Yes, Joseph, I have always been very careful. Why is it so important? Because it is the holy tradition.

Even the part about the egg shell. Yes, that too is important. Yes, everything in the law and the tradition is equally important. Repeat then after me the part about the egg shell.

One may not perforate an egg shell, fill it with oil and place it above the opening of the lamp so that drops fall therein. One may not even employ an earthenware vessel in this manner, though some rabbis permit it. If, however, the potter has already joined the two parts, then it is allowed, because it is actually only one vessel. Do you understand, Simon, and you, Jude? A person may not fill a bowl with oil on the sabbath, place it by the side of the lamp and put an end of wick in it, so that it may draw the oil to the flame. If you did so you would be breaking the sabbath. Now repeat what you have just said after me.

But what was she saying? What were these words that she was teaching the children? Did they have any meaning?

He who extinguishes the light, because he is in fear of heathen, of robbers, or of an evil spirit, or to enable a sick person to sleep—oh yes, to enable a sick person to sleep—is absolved. If his object is to save the lamp, the oil or the wick, he is guilty of a breach of the sabbath law. Children, listen, do pay attention. Joseph, Simon, Jude, Jesus, listen. Do not stare into the courtyard. Do not listen to the pigeons cooing. These are the words of the sages concerning the sabbath. No, Jesus, they are not the words spoken by God to Moses, they are the words of the elders, but they are holy, for Moses received the Law direct from God on Mount Sinai. He handed it down to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, the elders to the prophets, and the prophets handed it down to the men of the great synagogue.

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But the little boys were playing again. They were eyeing each other and giggling and there were not five but two only, and neither one of the two was Jesus. She had imagined that it was his beautiful, grave, little face that was turned up to her. She had forgotten. She was so weary that she had been dreaming as she talked, and she had thought he was there again, asking her how the tradition of the elders and the sayings of the sages could be equal to the Word of God.

She remembered now and the memory turned her faint again. He had come home as a mighty prophet. There should have been lights. All the house should have been ablaze with lighted candles and all the neighbours should have been bidden to the feast of welcome. But the house had been empty when he came and there had been no one to welcome him but herself; and when the neighbours came at last they had laughed at him because he could do no miracles; and afterwards they had tried to kill him; and now he was gone, and they had let him go alone. None of his brothers had stood by him in the synagogue. None had gone with him. If it hadn't been for young Simon, his cousin, she wouldn't have known what had happened. For his pursuers had come back jabbering incoherently of a miracle, and the town that night had been like a seething pot bubbling with fearful, malicious tales. They had had him in their hands and then, on the edge of the cliff, when they were about to throw him down, he had vanished.

That was the fearful thing. Nathan the scribe had come running back as if pursued by demons and had cried out to the men at the gate:

He escaped out of our hands by magic.

And one came saying that he had seen Jesus fly through the air and another said a cloud had covered him and



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whisked him away; and all the people had gathered in the market-place to hear the tales, and Jude said afterwards that they would have come in a body against their house had the Master not gone among them and sent them to their homes.

Young Simon had come late that night when they were all huddled together in the inner room, to tell them what had happened. He had followed the crowd hoping to protect Jesus and had been on the cliff and had seen them take hold of him. And he said the stories of magic were lies, but he had had to admit, when James questioned him, that he had lost sight of Jesus and did not know how he had escaped out of their hands or what had become of him. For though he had stayed behind and run down the road when the others had gone, calling Jesus by name, he had had no answer. The road was empty. Jesus must have gone, he said, another way.

She had been seized with terror when she heard this, for she knew there was no other way across the moor, and she had cried out to her sons:

You must go in search of him. He may be lying broken at the bottom of the cliff.

But they had not even looked at her when she cried out, and only Simon had answered.

No, they did not throw him down. He is gone.

And then they had all begun questioning Simon, and a new quarrel had arisen over the nature of the miracle; and the faces of her sons had been ugly and her daughters had moaned and rocked back and forth as if the house were visited with the plague or cholera. And suddenly in the disgraceful tumult she had known that the great fear in her was not fear for Jesus's life, for she heard Simon repeat the words. Yes, they had him in their hands when he vanished.



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Their faces, her daughters said, were blackened before all the people. They were no better than lepers now in the community. Jude said they would starve like as not. They had better move straight away to another town. Who would give them work now in Nazareth? And Joseph said they had best keep away from the synagogue, lest the sight of them cause another riot. But James said, no. God had grievously afflicted them through their brother. They must repent in dust and ashes; everyone of them must wear sackcloth next his skin; but they must stay in the town and eat the bread of bitterness daily and increase their attendance at the synagogue. All the family must go to the meeting-house, not only on the sabbath, but every Monday and Thursday, and they must all fast on those days as he had always fasted. Yes, even the children. And they must pray ceaselessly to God to remove his anger from them. As for Jesus, he must be from now on as one dead, and their house must be a house of mourning. And they had all been obedient to James and had lived ever since like a family bereaved and accursed.

But Jesus was not dead. He had only gone away. He was only lost. And what after all had he done that they should mourn him as if he were dead? He had angered the people, and failed to heal a blind man. Were these things deadly sins in the eyes of God? No. It was not that. She was so weary that her wits were all in confusion. He had claimed to be Elijah come again. That was his sin; and he had vanished when they would have killed him.

If only she knew where he was. Perhaps he had fled to the mountains. It might be that he was living in one of the caves in the hills. Or maybe he had gone back to the wilderness beyond Jordan, where he had once met Satan. James believed that his soul was in deadly peril. She could see it in his face. If that were true——? Yet she could do

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nothing but pray until she swooned with weariness, then pray again, and live on in the town that hated him, and teach the children how to keep the sabbath holy.

But she was too weary. Oh but she was weary of the rules of the sabbath. If only she could send the children away so that she might creep into a corner and weep. But when they had finished milking the goat they must go on with their lessons, for James said they must be taught the Law with increasing severity, so that they at least might be saved. And it had fallen to her to teach them because she was too old and too broken to be of use now in the house. She let the plates slip from her hands and could no longer carry a heavy water jar without spilling most of the contents. Teaching the children was the one thing left her to do, and she knew she should be proud to do it, for it was written, All thy children shall be taught of the Lord and great shall be the peace of thy children. Great peace have they who love the Law.

It wasn't true. All her life she had loved the Law and diligently she had taught her children to love and obey it, and she had no peace now day or night.

Why should we treat the tradition of the rabbis as if it were equal to the Word of God? That was the question that Jesus had asked and asked again all the days of his youth. And Joseph her husband had always answered the same thing.

In the days when Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and brought the people back from Babylon to the land that God had given them, the prophet Ezekiel founded the great synagogue and gave authority to its masters and they became the interpreters of God's holy Law.

Simon the Just was the last survivor of the great  
Antiquus of Socho received the tradition

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from Simon the Just. He handed it on to José, the son of Joesser of Zeredah, and he in turn to José, the son of Jochanan of Jerusalem, and after him came Joshua, the son of Perachyah, and Judah, the son of Tabbai, and Simeon, the son of Shatach, and Shemayah and Abtalyon and at last Hillel of Babylon, who was a great teacher in Jerusalem when you, Jesus, were born and each has added sayings to the Tradition and the holy succession has never been broken.

Peace, great peace, have they who love the Law.

It was a lie. She would have no peace now till her son who was lost came home again or until she was dead and had gone to find Joseph in Heaven, who had been such a rock of strength to her on the weary earth.

But if Jesus were lost, could she be happy even in Heaven? Yet what could she do? She didn't even know where he was. Silence in all that concerned him had descended like a pall on the house. Even the children were forbidden to mention his name.

. . . . .

He had gone back to Capernaum. He had friends there. It would be his home for a little while.

Strange to think of him going across the burning tract of wasteland where armies of Crusaders with his emblem on their shields were to die a thousand years later of thirst and exhaustion! Was it two thousand years ago or yesterday? A great clock has been ticking since and armies have marched and countermarched and slaughtered each other by hundreds of thousands in his name, but he was that day a very solitary man and the gentlest hero ever born.

Jesus a builder of Nazareth in Galilee. He should look so small in the distance, he should appear as no more than a speck moving across the treeless plateau with darkness

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rolling up from the valleys to blot him out. But his shadow seems to lengthen; it grows vast as time passes; it stretches across all the wilderness of the world. It's as if he were there for ever, walking swiftly in search of his friends, calling to them, with the sun going down and the sun rising and the stars endlessly wheeling over his head and the wind for ever driving clouds through the sky, while little men sleep and wake and sleep again and do not think of him, or if they do, hug themselves saying as they drop asleep for the last time, Yes, but not yet, to-morrow perhaps.

The Light of the World. Someone groping for words to describe him was to call him that. It was to become one of the names used by men who worshipped his memory; and he was, that night, like a burning torch moving across the ravaged face of the earth.

## Chapter Two

**H**E WAS entering on his period of greatest activity. His rebuff in Nazareth was a prelude to such an increase in his power over the people of the lake country that he was to become suddenly a figure of national importance. But his family were his enemies.

After his death, when he had become for many men, the Saviour of the World, his brothers were going to share in his glory. They were going to be given places of honour in the gatherings of his friends and be called reverently by those who worshipped him, the brothers of the Lord; and James, by virtue of being his blood brother, was going to become the head of the Church founded in his name in Jerusalem; but now their one wish was to disown him. And his mother, who was to be called the Mother of God, and be glorified because of him above all other women in the world, let herself be cut off from him, lived like a woman asleep, and only heard as if in her sleep, the distant shouts of crowds who acclaimed him, the sound of many feet that followed him.

But they were glad to see him in Capernaum. It is good to think of how glad his friends were, and how Peter and Andrew and James and John dropped their nets when they caught sight of him and ran to meet him and fell on his

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neck kissing him and laughing and weeping for joy at having him back again.

Peter saw him first. He gave a great shout and called out to the others, The Master has come! Look, the Master has come back to us! and James and John, who were out on the sunny water with Zebedee their father and the hired servants, mending their nets, immediately left the ship and ran to him. And then Peter's wife and his wife's mother came running out of the house to welcome him, and they made such a joyous commotion on the quay that the news spread like wind through the town. And soon all his old friends came hurrying along, all the sick folk whose bodies he had healed, all the miserable outcasts into whose lives he had brought happiness, all the bitter, hardened men and women whose hearts he had touched. The cripples, who had once dragged themselves along the ground so painfully to get to him, came briskly now; and those who had had to be carried to him on their beds, came carrying others; and the lewd women of the town who had once flaunted their vicious ways in his face and been made ashamed, came timidly like children and sat at his feet with the little children who adored him. Indeed, it was noticed that the dancing-girl, Mary of Magdala, when she came that evening and sat down shyly among the children in front of the fisherman's house, had herself the face of a radiant child.

All day they kept coming, until by evening a great throng of friends had gathered. The good Roman centurion whose servant he had healed, came with that same servant who was dear to him; and Chuza, Herod's steward, came with his wife Joanna, for his whole family loved and believed in him; and Joanna, that great lady of the court, sat down in her fine clothes beside poor Simon who had been a leper; and Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, sat



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near him holding a widow's ailing child on his august knees. For all these people, great and humble, were like brothers and sisters together in his presence. He saw no difference between them and there was no difference because they all loved him in the same way.

And he began at once to talk to them again about the Kingdom of Heaven. Harken to me, he said, everyone of you and understand. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. It is here now in the midst of you. And it did indeed seem that evening to be true, such a happy, loving spirit pervaded the gathering. And as he went on to explain to them how God, their heavenly Father, would set up His Kingdom on earth if only they would turn to Him with all their hearts, some of those present, like Peter and James and John and Mary of Magdala, began to understand what he meant. And when he took a little child who was there and set him on his feet before them all, and said, Of such is the Kingdom, though they did not quite see how the great God of Israel would free them from the rule of the Romans by making them into the likeness of the little boy who stood between his knees, they believed him without understanding, because they loved him at that moment, just as the child did and had faith in him.

But of them all, it was perhaps Mary of Magdala who understood him best and loved him most. For she had been a wild, tortured creature, greatly gifted for love, but so desperately distracted by her passions that the men who used her said she was possessed of seven devils. Indeed, she was being driven by her reckless life to the verge of madness when she first saw Jesus. Something in his face, something in the sound of his voice had arrested her, just as the voice of one of the strong shepherds in the mountain meadows above the lake would often save a hunted,

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frightened sheep, that stood quivering with terror on the edge of a precipice.

It was like that with the Magdalene and Jesus. Though she was more like a wild, nervous creature of the mountains than a humble sheep and he more glorious than the most valiant of all the shepherds in Galilee, they had recognised one another. He had known her instantly as one of his own, had looked behind the evil mask of her tormented face down into her ardent heart, and his own heart had gone out to her as it did to all helpless, unhappy people. And though she had fled from him again and again, she had been unable to keep away from him while he was there, and could not forget him when he was gone, and could not go back to her lovers, for her old life in the wine shops of Magdala had become abominable to her.

And so when he came back and she saw him again, she had had such a sense of freedom and peace that it was as if she had found herself suddenly in Heaven with a new light body like the sweet body of an angel or a child, and she was so beside herself with joy that she could not contain the gratitude that filled her heart. She felt she must do something to show this friend who had saved her, what he meant to her, and she did what she could do. She ran to the bazaar and bought an alabaster box of perfume, very costly and precious, and came with it one night to the house of a rich Pharisee where Jesus was a guest at dinner, and she made her way in and stood behind him, where he was reclining at table. And she broke the box and poured the costly perfume over his feet, and began to weep as if her heart would break, and kept kissing his feet and washing them with her tears and wiping them with the hair of her head. And Jesus was grateful to her. He did not think it a foolish or an extravagant thing to do, and when Simon, the Pharisee who was his host, said to himself, This man

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if he were a prophet would have known who and what manner of woman this is who is touching him, Jesus said:

Simon, I have something to say to you. There was a certain creditor who had two debtors: the one owed five-pence and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me which of them will love him most?

Simon answered, I suppose he to whom he forgave most.

And Jesus said, You have rightly judged. And, turning toward Mary, he said, Simon, do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head. You gave me no kiss but this woman has not ceased kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil but she has anointed my feet with ointment, wherefore I say unto you, her sins, her many sins, are forgiven, for she loved much. And he said to her, Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

And those who sat with him at the dinner began to say to themselves, Who is this man that forgiveth sins?

But neither Jesus nor Mary troubled about what they said.

And he began again to go about among the villages proclaiming the advent of the Kingdom and healing the sick. And where crowds had come before, there were multitudes now. They came not only from the country round the lake but from Jerusalem and Idumea on the borders of Arabia and from beyond Jordan and about Tyre and Sidon. And they would not leave him alone. They besieged him with such insistence that he often had no time even to eat. To preach on the quay outside Peter's house or in the streets or public squares of Capernaum became impossible.

His friends put a house at his disposal, and Peter and



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readers that when God established His Kingdom on earth, He would make the Jews lords of the whole world, and they knew that in that day every Jew who had kept the Law would be like a prince, no matter what manner of man he was, while every idolater would be his slave and would ultimately be cast into hell. And when Jesus told them that only those among them who loved God the Father with their whole hearts would share in the glory of the Kingdom, they paid little attention, for they said to themselves, Certainly we love God. He is our God. We are Jews, His own people. And many of them were not interested in what he had to say about the poor in spirit or the pure in heart. They were only interested in the politics of the matter. They could not separate the Kingdom of Heaven in their minds from a great and sudden revolution which would free them from Herod and the Romans, put an end to their detestable taxes and usher in a new, glorious era of prosperity. Moreover, now that Jesus had aroused their hopes, they wanted to know just how soon these things were going to happen. The clever ones began to question him. But when he answered, The Kingdom comes not with watching, nor shall men say, Behold it is here or there, for it is within you, many of them thought he was talking nonsense, and the educated men in the audience began to sneer at his teaching and make sarcastic comments. But all the simple folk thronged to him in greater and ever greater numbers. And they came not only because of his miracles, but because no teacher had ever talked to them before with a great love for them shining in his face. Nor had they ever in all their troubled past known a prophet who was a joyous friendly man, fond of good company and the music and laughter of wedding feasts, but happy to share a crust of bread with the poorest family in the town. Indeed, it was

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very wonderful to the poor people who, because of their poverty, were unable to keep strictly to the Law, to feel that they were loved by this great man of God.

They came in such numbers that when he was down by the lake, he would have to put off from the shore in a boat and speak to them from the water because they crowded so against him on land that he could not stand, even with the two stalwart sons of Zebedee beside him to keep them off. And all those who had plagues and sores and noisome diseases pressed upon him to touch him, believing that if they could only so much as touch his clothes they would be healed. And it was so.

He had healed many before by laying his hands on them, but now there was such power in him and such faith in that power possessed them that a strange thing happened. His body became for them a sacred miracle-working object, a thing charged with power that could not fail. He did not will this, nor want it. He had more important work to do than heal their bodies. He wanted to explain his great plan to them. He was impatient to get on with his tremendous task of founding the Kingdom of Heaven. Eternal life and perfect, glorious happiness in that Kingdom was the gift he wanted to give them, and he knew that all they wanted from him was health and strength for this short moment of life in this small, troubled, ephemeral world. Nevertheless, he could not gainsay them. He allowed them to use him. Because of his pity for them he was become their victim. He could not help himself, nor spare himself. He was defenceless against their blind faith in him, and at the touch of their anguished believing hands, the power in him instantly went out of him to heal them.

They didn't know what they were doing to him. They didn't know what they cost him. They couldn't see how

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vulnerable he was, how acutely sensitive, how weak the body that was the vehicle of such mighty mysterious forces; yet they might have known. For when a sick woman touched him one day in the dense crowd that pressed against him on every side, he turned quickly and looked to see who it was, and said, Who touched me? and the look on his face made the poor creature cower with terror. But it wasn't anger that made him turn. He reassured her quickly when he saw her trembling. It was something that he never attempted to explain. Indeed, there have never been any words that could make clear to men's minds the kind of experience that the power pouring through him, forced his exhausted body to endure for their sakes.

It was enough for them all as his love was enough. With their noisome breath beating in his face and their crazed minds fastening on his mind, and their sick hearts sucking like leeches on his brave heart, he opened his arms to them, kept on calling to them with passionate insistence:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden. Come and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you will have rest unto your souls.

He had declared in the synagogue at Nazareth that he had been sent by God to bind up the broken-hearted. He had claimed to be the one foretold by the prophet Isaiah who was to give sight to the blind and liberty to the captives. And what he had claimed was come true. He did what he had said he would do. They came to him and he healed them, and he knit their broken hearts together, and all that believed in him were set free, like Mary of Magdala, from their dreary miserable selves, and he sufficed them all. He became for them all, not only their Saviour, but their teacher and friend. He dragged them all with

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him out of their darkness toward the Kingdom of Heaven, all the heavy diseased mass of them, and he set that goal before them like a shining light, and put them on their feeble feet, and taught them patiently to walk toward the light as one teaches little children. And when they faltered and fell, he went back and lifted them up again and was never weary of them, and those among the sick who could not be well away from his presence, he suffered to be with him constantly, and all the while, day after day, he kept on teaching them about the Kingdom of Heaven.

Repent and believe for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

For twenty years he had been studying the history of his people, and he had found in their sacred records the secret of his nation's downfall. It was written on every page and it was perfectly simple. The fate of the Jews depended on their cleaving to God. God was their king. They must have no other. But He was as well their heavenly Father who loved them with a jealous love and hated their iniquity. They must be the holy nation He had destined them to be, or they would be nothing.

But they had wanted to be like other nations. They had coveted riches and power and land and the panoply of kings and the glory of arms. Once they had lived in tents and been governed by holy priests who talked with God. But in the days of the judges, the patriarchs of Israel had gone to Samuel, their priest, and said, Make us a king to judge us like other nations, and Samuel, in great distress, had reported their words to the Lord and the Lord had said, Hearken to the voice of the people. They have not rejected you, they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. Now, therefore, hearken unto them, yet protest solemnly.

And Samuel, the last of the priestly judges, had warned



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the people but they would not listen, and said, Nay, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations. So Samuel had anointed Saul, the son of Kish, as king over Israel; and Saul had sinned against God and been disobedient, and David, the shepherd son of Jesse, had reigned in his stead and David had been a mighty warrior, but he too had sinned; and under David Israel had become a great nation of the earth and had waged wars of conquest and had become proud and very rich; and because David had loved God in spite of his many sins, God had made a covenant with him and had promised to establish his line for ever. And now they were the most miserable nation in the world, yet they clung to that promise and believed that God would restore the glorious line of David and that they were still the chosen people of God. But they did not even now understand that the promise would not be fulfilled until they became again, not only the people but the very children of God. Then, and only then, when they had turned back to Him with their whole hearts would he re-establish his Kingdom and bring in the glorious era they expected.

This was the message he had to deliver, this the truth he must explain to them. He had been taught it as a child. Ever since, he had pondered over it. Now he must make the people act on it. And so day after day he endeavoured to explain to them how it was necessary before the coming of the Deliverer that each one of them should repent. They must be so changed that it would be like being born again: each one separately and of his own free will must become the child of God his Father. This was the basis of his plan. Utterly simple, it yet involved a complete reversal of all their habits, and a moral code so revolutionary that it was bound to destroy the very foundations of their old system if it prevailed.

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But he did not think that he was telling the people anything new. He went to them as a Jew, filled with the spirit of the prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Daniel, and that other Jesus, the son of Sirach, they had all proclaimed the same truth, and their words were constantly on his lips, as the holy Law God had given to Moses was engraved on his heart; and he protested vehemently at this period of his life, when the biblical scholars and lawyers in his audience accused him of overthrowing the Law:

I have not come to destroy the Law but to fulfil it.

Nor would he ever admit that he broke the Law. For to love God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself, he declared, was the whole Law and there was no other.

He would turn from the learned doctors to the waiting, wondering mass of the people and go on again with the one subject that obsessed him and speak gently to them.

Be not anxious for your life as to what ye shall eat: nor yet for your body as to what ye shall wear. Look at the birds of the air: they do not sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they?

Why then be anxious? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin, yet I tell you, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things. Seek His Kingdom and His righteousness and all these shall be given you besides.

And he would point out to them how the summer was deepening round them, how the grapes were swelling in the vines, the fields whitening with the harvest, and would remind them of how soon it would all be gone.

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And while he talked, all the forces of the world were massing against him.

They were gathering over his head as the clouds gathered during those sultry days, piling themselves up behind the mountains that shut in the steaming lake. He must have been aware of them in much the same sense as he was aware of that distant muttering while he went about the country through the deep, beautiful summer teaching the people, endeavouring to make them understand by green fields full of lilies or woodlands full of bright birds or on high mountain meadows thick with flowers. But if he was aware of the coming conflict, he still did not, could not have known how it was going to end. For he was on fire with a great hope, and though he was no longer quite the same joyous herald of glad tidings that he had been, since he saw now that the people would not believe the truth simply for the telling, he still believed that he would succeed in his utterly simple tremendous business of bringing his nation into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jerusalem lay to the south of him, with its army of priests, its religious schools, and that high court of supreme justice, the Great Sanhedrin. It had ignored so far the rustic Galilean preacher, but it was now becoming alarmed by his influence over the masses in the north, and had decided to send some of its learned men to report on him. Rome watched through the cold eyes of Pontius Pilate from the coast town of Cæsarea. Herod, the cunning tetrarch, who was soon to have John the Baptizer beheaded, was asking questions about him in his castle not five miles distant, and in the great body of the nation itself, his miracles were rousing on the one hand wild expectations of political power, on the other a growing animosity. For the Zealots, always on the alert for a leader who would rouse the nation to rebellion, mistook him for such a man.

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They were going to attempt to exploit him for their own ends; already they were twisting his words about the Kingdom of Heaven to their own meaning. While the great conservative mass of pious Pharisees stood behind the scribes, jurists and biblical scholars in their will to defeat this intruder who had dared enter the closed fastness of their special domain bringing with him a hurricane of fresh air.

To those professionals of the synagogue who were honest men, he presented a dilemma. Not only did he perform miracles, he was evidently a profound student of the holy scriptures: yet he broke the Law for which their forefathers had died; and his originality itself was a crime. Every teacher's duty was to pass on what he had been taught exactly as he received it, and no one was permitted to teach who had not sat at the feet of some acknowledged teacher and been ordained; and this man had no master, he spoke in his own name saying, I say unto you. It was no wonder that the lawyers, city-clerks and school teachers, whose business it was to teach and administer the Law, that was at one and at the same time the law of God and the civil law, it was no wonder that they trembled for their prestige, and began to attack his method and question his authority.

Some did so earnestly, for they were serious men, like the good rabbi of Nazareth, but others were quibblers, hair-splitters who delighted in argument, and others again were small, mean, jealous men like Nathan, who came to sneer and scoff.

He dealt with them for a time patiently, answering their arguments like a good Pharisee, turning to their own scriptures for his authority, and he confounded them again and again by his knowledge; but suddenly in the presence of the learned scholars who had been sent from Jerusalem

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to find out what manner of man he was, his patience seemed to give out.

In a flash it seemed to come to him that he must challenge the right of anyone to question his authority, and he did so by saying to a man who was brought to him to be healed of the palsy what he had said to Mary, Your sins are forgiven.

As it happened the crowd that thronged the house that day was so dense that there was no room, even about the door, and the four men who carried the paralytic in order to get at Jesus had had to go up on to the housetop and tear up the roof and let the sick man down on his bed into the midst of the people. And when, instead of healing the man, he said those startling words, all the people heard him. But he was looking at the learned scribes from Jerusalem who were sitting there, and when he saw that they were accusing him in their hearts of blasphemy, he followed up his challenge by another, and said, Which is easier, to say to this paralytic, Thy sins are forgiven, or to say, Rise and take up thy bed and walk? And he said to the sick man, Rise and go to thy house. And the man rose immediately and picked up his bed and went out.

And so the battle was engaged. He had laid claim to supreme authority, had made himself, so they declared, equal to God; and yet he had certainly not meant to do this. It was as if he had been carried beyond himself by the urgent power that was in him. But nothing that he could say to them after that could have persuaded them that he was a pious Jew, nor did he seem to care any more what they thought. For he invited their criticism by going out into the fields on the sabbath with his disciples and plucking the ears of ripe corn; and he feasted continually with disreputable folk; and finally on another sabbath he defied them in the synagogue itself.

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There was a man there with a withered hand, and they watched him to see whether he would heal him on the sabbath day that they might accuse him. And he said to the man, Stand forth, and he said to them with biting sarcasm, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath day or to do evil? To save life or to kill? But they were silent. And when he had looked round the circle at each one of them with anger, he said to the man, Stretch forth your hand. And he stretched it out and it was restored whole as the other.

After that the schoolmen of Jerusalem left him. They went back to report to the Sanhedrin. They had seen what they wanted to see, they had made up their minds about him. But there were other scribes there among the Pharisees who went straight away to confer with Herod's men as to how they might destroy him.

He had attacked, as it were in spite of himself, the whole of the established order and become the author of a new law, and he may well have been in despair when he looked round on his followers. If he was, he gave no sign, but crying to the people, He who is not with me is against me! He pressed on more urgently than ever before with his Father's business of establishing the Kingdom of Heaven. And a revival of national and religious feeling began during the last weeks of that hot summer by the lake of Galilee such as had not been known in Israel since the days of the Maccabees. It swept through the people rousing them to strange excitement, a great stirring began in all the country, a great coming and going along the dusty roads.

Men left the grain standing high in the fields waiting to be cut, left the orchards heavy with fruit waiting to be gathered into baskets, left their vineyards and their shops, their gardens and their herds and flocks; and women left their looms and their spinning-wheels and

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dragging or carrying their children with them, flocked to see this man who wrought such great miracles and kept proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God. Was it the end? Could the time, so long awaited, be upon them at last? In every town and village men began to whisper among themselves. Who is he? What is he? Is he Elijah come again? Or is he that greater one, that appointed son of God, who is to free the people and himself establish the Kingdom of Heaven? And for the first time one might have heard during those burning days or those still soft nights when the mysterious moon hung high above the lake, the voices of young men that spoke in awed undertones, saying, He is the Messiah. And presently the word went round that though he was a builder from Nazareth in Galilee, he was a descendant of the royal house of David and had been born in David's city of Bethlehem.

No one knew who started the rumour. But a young man had come down from Nazareth to join him, a kinsman of his who belonged to the party of the Zealots. Perhaps it was he who spread the electrifying news of the Galilean carpenter's royal lineage. Whoever it was, he had lighted a fire in the hearts of the young patriots that could be put out no more easily than a fire raging in the dry stubble of those arid, windswept uplands between Nazareth and Capernaum. For it meant, if it were true, that this man was the one destined to be their king. Nor did it seem to them strange among so much that was altogether wonderful that he who was calling on men to repent and teaching men humbly concerning the love of God should be destined to lead a victorious rebellion against Cæsar.

## Chapter Three

**W**HAT is it, James? Oh! James, what is it? What has happened?

Hush, Mother.

He motioned to her to be quiet from across the courtyard and closed the heavy door into the street carefully behind him. It was always kept closed now by his own express command but there was something furtive in his movements that frightened her, and he was dreadful to look at as he came toward her with his lean finger on his bearded lips. A skeleton of a man in a grey robe smeared with dust and sweat and ashes, he staggered with exhaustion and looked back over his shoulder as if afraid of being followed.

She thought, He's been out again to the gate, and he's been set upon by his brother's enemies, and she ran to him as he stumbled and caught the great, gaunt, hairy man in her thin arms, crying:

Where have you been? Who has done this to you? But he held her off, staring strangely at her through his matted locks and said in a whisper, I've come to no harm, Mother. Is there any one about?

No one. Your brothers are at work and their wives have gone out with the children.

Gone? Where have they gone?

To Zepphoris, to the fair. I couldn't prevent them. They said no one would notice them in the crowd and



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why should they live continually in mourning for one who was not dead? They were young they said. They had done no wrong and they had a right to live as others lived. But Oh! James, what is it?

She spoke hurriedly, expecting him to be angry with the young women, but he seemed not to have heard her answer to his question and sank down on the bench where she'd been sitting by the door of the inner room and leaning forward, his sharp elbows on his bony knees, he held his huge head in his hands and was silent.

Oh, poor James. Oh, my dreadful, pitiful son! she whispered to herself. What new horror have you conjured out of the dark deeps of your mind? And she fetched a cup of cold water from the jar inside the door and said, Drink, you are utterly exhausted, then stood waiting for him to speak. And though she was frightened by his appearance, she asked herself again, as she had done sometimes during the past months, if it could truly please God to see a man reduced through fear of Him to such a pass. Indeed, there had been moments, when, in spite of her anguished love for her eldest son, she had wanted to rebel like the young women of the house against the penance James imposed on them all. A sly voice would whisper in her ear, What good does it do Jesus, for you to fast continually and wear sackcloth till your body is all one sore? He continues to go his own way of rejoicing for all your prayers and self-inflicted sufferings. You'd much better bathe your body and have a nice bit of roast lamb for supper to-night. It can make no difference. And though she had recoiled from the voice, she had found it impossible to remember every hour of every day, month after month, that her eldest son might be cast into hell if she did not suffer continually and ceaselessly intercede with him before God. She might even have forgotten his

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transgressions in her longing to see him again, had James not been there to remind her.

James would allow no one in the family to forget that the wrath of God lay upon their house. Every morning and every evening he would read some fearsome passage from the holy Law and every sabbath and every Tuesday and Thursday he would drive them all to the synagogue, even though his mother were so faint and weary that she had to be supported to the door by two of her sons, even though such a trembling shook her at the sight of all the staring congregation that she was like to fall to the ground.

But it will come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe, to do all His commandments, that all these curses shall come upon them.

Cursed shalt thou be in the city and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body and the fruit of thy land.

And if any one of the household grumbled about the dry bread and water that was put before them, or if the young women loitered in the street or the children forgot themselves and shouted at play, he would turn to the most terrible passage of all:

If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams and giveth a sign or a wonder, and the sign come to pass whereof he spoke saying, Let us go after other gods, that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God.

And they would all cower before him and the children would whimper with fear because of the look on his face.

And so the autumn had passed and with winter great

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hardships had come, for it was as Jude had foretold. Almost no one came to the carpenter's shop or sent for them to repair the roofs of their barns and houses. Jude had had to hire himself out as a day labourer, Joseph was planning to go as a shepherd to a rich landowner who owned many flocks, Simon alone went on making yokes and goads. And James could no longer control their grumbling or forbid them to discuss their absent brother's outrageous activities for he was living, so they were told, like a prince, while they toiled and starved because of him. Indeed, it was impossible even for James to pretend to ignore his brother's triumphant existence.

Nazareth was too near Capernaum to remain indifferent to its despised citizen. There was such a constant coming and going between the two that the hill town by the end of the summer was buzzing with rumours of the great religious revival going on down in the valley. And though for the most part, the people disbelieved the stories of Jesus's miracles, first one then another had come back to declare that they were true, and some had even been persuaded by what they saw and heard that he was after all a great and holy rabbi. Solomon the miller was one and his wife Susannah. The miller had stood up among all the men by the gate and declared that Jesus was no traitor to his people but a great patriot and a mighty prophet. And a loud dispute had broken out at his saying and the women too had taken it up, for Susannah had gone about among her neighbours saying the same thing; and the town ever since had been divided into factions with Nathan the clerk and many of the town councillors on one side, Solomon and his friends and a band of young, hot-headed Zealots on the other. And many of the young men had gone to join young Simon, Jesus's cousin, down in the lake-lands, and strange rumours came back of how the

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young men were gathering in lower Galilee from all parts of the country.

Simon's parents said nothing. They took no part in the discussions and James did his best to keep his women shut up at home. But he could not. First one of his brothers' wives would slip out, then another. Even his mother would go sometimes to her sister's house and come home with her strange eyes burning, and, in spite of himself, James would ask her what she had learned, and though every story he was told could only add to his conviction that Jesus was possessed of a power that was altogether evil, he still could not resist his longing to know what men were saying.

And though the others said: We have washed our hands of our eldest brother. Of what interest to us now are his doings? Let his blood be on his own head. It is no concern of ours what becomes of him, they had not believed what they said. The faces of all the congregation in the synagogue proclaimed to them every sabbath that they were marked people, branded with the brand of their kinsman. Their loud words were empty. They knew in their hearts that they could not deny Jesus.

For the mother of the house, it had become as the winter wore on, more and more dreadful. There were times when her longing to see her eldest son tore at her entrails, there were others when she was sick with terror. When she heard such testimony as Solomon's, or talked to her sister, the hope and faith she still had in Jesus would flutter frantically in her heart only to be crushed down again by some new report of his contempt for the Law and his sinful life.

She did not believe the reports of his blasphemous claims. She refused to believe them. It was impossible that he should make himself equal to God and claim the

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power to forgive sins. And she did her best to persuade herself that the many stories of his great miracles were not true and when word came that little Naomi, the blacksmith's daughter, was ailing again, she was glad, for though James filled her with horror, his fear was her own. They shared it together and it concerned Jesus's immortal soul.

James was not like the others. He did not love Jesus, but he did love and fear the terrible God of Israel with all his soul and all his strength and all his might.

Now she knew that he had heard something of dire import and she stood over him waiting for him to speak and presently, when he still said nothing, she began to pray silently, for it came to her where he had been without his telling her, and she went on praying desperately with her face held up to the pale, wintry sky overhead.

Our Father, our King, hear us, spare us, have mercy on us. O Father and King, hear us, spare us, have mercy on us. Save him for Thy sake if not for ours. Do it for Thy sake. Save him. And she repeated the words again and again, faster and faster, saying them aloud at last without knowing it, until a groan interrupted her and she stopped. Then she said quietly to the man beside her:

The Master has come back from Jerusalem?

Yes.

He sent for you?

Yes.

What did he have to say to you?

It was as we feared. He had been summoned by the Pharisees of the Sanhedrin together with the rabbis of Capernaum, Choraizon, Bethsaida and other towns in Galilee, to give an account of your son. The whole Sanhedrin then met to debate the matter; and though some were

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inclined to leniency, the others overbore them. It was decided to excommunicate him.

You mean that he will be cast out of the synagogue?

Yes, a priest will read out the decree from the pulpit of every meeting-house in the land.

She stood very still with her thin hands clasped tight together, her great eyes wide and staring in her withered face.

There were three degrees of excommunication. The casting out of the synagogue, the delivery over to Satan, the anathema proclaimed by the high priest with the sounding of trumpets. The anathema was most fearful. The excommunicate was cursed with the curse of Joshua against Jericho and the curse of Elisha against those that mocked him and the curse of fiends of deadly power. Let nothing good come out of him, let his end be sudden, let all creatures become his enemies, let the whirlwind crush him, the fever and every other malady and the edge of the sword smite him. Let his end be unforeseen and drive him into outer darkness.

Once not so very long ago she had heard these fearful words of malediction read out over a man named Ezra, an ass driver who consorted with idolaters, sinned with harlots in the temple of Astarte and boasted his unbelief when he was full of wine, shouting, What man is such a fool as to put his trust in the God of Israel? Give me Moloch or the Queen of Heaven, a god that I can see with my own eyes. And now he lived, so men said, like a wild beast in the mountains and no one dared befriend him.

Her Jesus to become like that? It was impossible. Surely it was impossible?

Will he be accursed, James? she whispered. Will they pronounce the malediction?

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No, not yet. At least so one of the secretaries to the Sanhedrin gave the Master to understand.

For months she had lived in fear of some such dreadful thing. Now it was done. But it was not the worst. He would only suffer the first degree of excommunication. Her relief at the assurance gave her suddenly the measure of her past terror.

It had been summer when he came home for the last time. Now the winter was ending. Soon there would be a new spring and a new feast of the Passover and all the roads would be thronged with pilgrims going up to Jerusalem. All the fathers and mothers of Israel would take the road with their young sons, just as she and Joseph had done; and all the little boys would go past her door, laughing and singing at the top of their lungs just as Jesus used to do. But she would never go up again to the feast with her children and her eldest son striding proudly ahead of her. He was numbered now with the malefactors. But he was not a malefactor. She knew him. She knew it wasn't true.

There must be some mistake. She must be asleep. Oh! if only she were. If only she could wake from this awful dream and find herself back with Joseph and the children. What had happened? What had become of them all? They were gone. This haggard man with matted hair and bloodshot eyes was a stranger; and the three men who would presently come lumbering home to their meagre, joyless meal were strangers. James, Joseph, Simon, Judah, these men bore the names of her sons but they were men she did not know. She had loved the others and they were gone. Only Jesus was left, Jesus from whom she was separated was left to her. He was changed yet always the same.

What did it all mean? Why wasn't she with him? What had life done to her?

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Once long ago on one of those happy journeys, her husband had pointed out to her the great hall in the temple where the high priest of the nation presided over the deliberations of the mighty Sanhedrin. She tried to picture now the awful assembly that had power to condemn a man to eternal punishment. But she could not. She could only see a humble family of Galileans, a mother and her boys, clinging together lest they be separated in the throng, staring awe-struck at the great door behind which sat the seventy judges of Israel. If Jesus were summoned before the judgment seat of God she would know what to do. She would crawl on her knees to the steps of God's throne and beseech Him to be merciful to her son. But the members of the Sanhedrin were more awful and more distant from her little world than the archangels who stood before the throne of God. If she appeared before them——? Her mind faltered. She could never appear before them. She could never reach them. She saw herself hurrying alone through the vast empty corridors of the temple, a widow in a dusty shawl, brought at last to a halt and cowering before that closed door, baffled, utterly helpless.

But it wasn't true. It was only a bad dream. It hadn't happened. It could never happen.

Don't you understand, Mother? Didn't you hear what I said?

Yes, James, yes.

How then can you stand there so quietly? Something must be done. We can no longer go on as we are doing. He is still your son and we are involved in his fate and responsible.

But what can we do, James? We know no one who could intercede for him in Jerusalem. Besides, she added feebly, he isn't a prisoner on trial. He is only cast out.



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He interrupted her with a cry of fury. Only cast out? Is that nothing to you? Your eldest son and the son of my father is to be made an outcast, his name a byword mouthed in every market-place in Jewry, and you say we should do nothing?

And who knows if that will be the end? The Sanhedrin on this occasion debated his activities with an open mind. There were even some present among the learned doctors who defended him. They declared that he answered the scribes as a good Pharisee, even in regard to the sabbath, and they maintained that to tell a man his sins were forgiven did not in itself constitute blasphemy. Indeed one said that he was simply a learned rabbi with views of his own who discussed points of doctrine in the manner of Hillel and Shammai, but his defenders among the Pharisees were overborne, mainly, it seems, for political reasons. The Sadducees and the chief priests fear his power over the people. If there were an uprising, Pontius Pilate—

What has the Roman governor of Judea to do with my son who is a Jew in Galilee?

You don't understand, Mother. Neither Pilate nor the Sadducees care aught about the doctrine of any Galilean teacher. What they fear is a tumult among the people. The master explained to me that Jesus's influence had spread far beyond the lake country. The Zealots are beginning to speak of him as the Messiah, and it is not only the Zealots who are beginning to believe this preposterous thing, all the outcasts of the nation are flocking to him as their saviour. Thieves, harlots, demoniacs, every sort of disreputable wretch who was without hope has put his hope in him.

He has become their champion. They worship him as if he were a god. Suppose he should raise the rabble against the authorities? What then? Would the great Sanhedrin

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debate his doctrine then with an open mind? Would it discuss calmly his teaching concerning marriage and divorce? Would it be satisfied to curse him with the curse of Joshua? I tell you, Mother, he must be prevented, and we must prevent him from continuing his dangerous activities.

But, James, it isn't true. It isn't true.

What isn't true?

That only malefactors and outcasts follow him, that all these evil folk worship him as a God.

How do you know it isn't true? What do you know of it?

Young Simon has written to his mother. Clophas read me the letter. He begs his parents to believe nothing they hear against Jesus, to come and see for themselves. He says that Jesus has founded a school, that many good and devout people have joined themselves to him and that he is acknowledged as a rabbi of profound wisdom. He says that he has seventy disciples, almost as many as the great Hillel, and that the life they all lead together is so beautiful that it is like the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

It is a lie. It must be a lie. Young Simon was always a hot head. He has been bewitched. What does he say to his mother of all the flighty women who have left their husbands and children to trail after your son wherever he goes? Does he mention the dancer of Magdala who ministers to him like a slave girl and spends the wages of her harlotry on precious ointment for his feet?

Don't, James, don't. I can't bear it.

You must bear it. You must face it. You know as well as I that your son is no great and holy rabbi. Does a holy man of God defile himself and make a mock of the elders? If you will not believe the evil tales told of him, you need not believe them. You know in your heart that

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he has no respect for the Law or for our masters who are the guardians of the Law.

Does the Master of Nazareth say that?

Yes. He says that Jesus has not been content to meet the arguments of the scribes but has gone out of his way to attack them and make them ridiculous in the eyes of the people. It was reported in Jerusalem that he had called them hypocrites, vipers, whited sepulchres, all manner of evil names.

Which some of them doubtless merited.

Mother!

She faced him. Well, what of Nathan the town-clerk of this place? Is he not a hypocrite and a viper? I tell you, James, I care nothing for such accusations, nor do I care for the talk of politicians. Jesus is no rebel against the state. He cares nothing for politics. He loves the poor because of their suffering. I do not believe for one moment that he would lend himself to the scheme of the Zealots. Nor do you. You know very well that he has always cautioned the young men of the place against any appeal to arms. Those who would attribute to him such wild ambitions don't understand him.

Do you?

No, oh no.

Yet you talk now as if you believed in him, as if you were with him against the Law, the synagogue and the faith of our people.

No, James, no. I do not. I cannot. Would God that I could. She wrung her hands. I can only love him. Don't you understand? I cannot deny the faith that is in me. I fear and love the God of Israel and His holy Law. I am frightened for Jesus, but I cannot believe that he is false, that he is wilfully leading the people astray.

His works proclaim him. We know now, you and I, that

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he is no ordinary man. A prophet, false or true, which is he? A man of God like Elijah? A son of God with the power of God in him or a madman possessed by the great powers of darkness? But we know that he cannot be a prophet of God because he has attacked the holy Law that God gave our people.

What then of his magic? Do you believe the stories of his miracles or not? He performed none in Nazareth. Why? Because he was known here too well. He dared not call upon the powers of darkness in this house where he was brought up. But now, what of the tales brought back from Capernaum by the miller and his wife? Do you make these friends liars or do you believe that your son has raised the dead? Who would invent such tales if they were not true? And if they are true, what power is there in the world to do such things save the power of Satan?

She was cowering on the bench beside him.

I do not believe it, she whispered.

You do not believe the miracles or that he does them with the help of the powers of darkness?

I do not believe that he raised the dead. I do not believe in these tales of magic. I know that he is a good man.

Then if he is good, he is mad and he must be put under restraint. Saint, madman, beguiler or sorcerer, he is your son and he is to be cast out of the synagogue. I shall call the family together this evening. I will send word to your daughters and their husbands. My father's sister shall come too and Clophas. We will take counsel together as to what shall be done.

And he did as he said and they all came together that evening. His brothers and their wives, his sisters and their husbands, and Mary the wife of Clophas with her husband, and they sat round the table in the inner room

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and the brothers passed judgment on Jesus, who had brought such disgrace on his family, and debated what should be done in view of his punishment that was to be proclaimed throughout the land. And the young women sat together huddled in their shawls and were silent, as befitted the daughters of Israel, but their faces were dark with anger against the man who was absent. Indeed to the mother of the house it seemed as if the room was filled with darkness, as if the light of the two candles on the table was all soaked up by their black shawls. She could see nothing but their eyes that gleamed in the candle-light like the eyes of animals. And her sons and her sons' wives and her daughters were horrible to her for she knew that they hated Jesus. But it was not so with her sister and her brother Clophas. Strong and quiet, the clear eyes of Mary, the mother of young Simon who loved Jesus, watched the others with stern disapproval.

James was utterly spent. His voice was the voice of a dead man as he explained to them what the Master of Nazareth had told him and what he proposed to do.

We must go and bring him home. He must be put under restraint. You Jude and Joseph and Simon must come with me to Capernaum and our mother must accompany us.

But the others debated before they agreed to do what James bade them, whether Jesus were indeed out of his mind, and Jude said:

He is no more mad than I am. He is living a life of ease, supported by the rich gifts of his followers.

And Joseph said: He is like a man filled with wine. He is so drunk with the admiration of the crowd that he thinks himself a god.

But Simon was of James's opinion and said, He is possessed.

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And at last all agreed that whatever the truth, the wisest plan was to declare to the authorities that he was beside himself and not answerable for his actions, and it was decided that they should proceed immediately to Capernaum.

But Clophas lifted his grey head and said: Suppose he refuses to obey you? What then? Will you lay hold of your father's eldest son with your hands?

And when James said: He will come with us peaceably enough when he hears of the decision of the Sanhedrin, the elder man shook his head and at last his wife cried out looking at Mary, Do not do this thing, my sister! Do not lend yourself to this plan.

But at that the younger women all clamoured together. She must go. Our mother must go. He will pay no heed to his brothers but he is bound to listen to his mother.

And Mary said to herself: Who are they to judge their brother? What have I to do with these men who hate him? James alone of them all, cares what becomes of him. And suppose James were wrong. Suppose the Master of Nazareth himself and all the rabbis in Jewry were wrong, wrong about the Law, mistaken about the will of God? What if Jesus is right? What if he is the only man alive to-day in Israel who knows God and speaks the truth?

And it seemed to her for an instant as if all the world fell away from her. All the mean houses full of little mean people, that crowded up against her house and the room in which she was sitting, with her sons and daughters, it was as if it all vanished and as if she were free from her body and flying like an angel towards great happiness.

But the room swam back again and the circle of dark faces ringed her once more, all with gleaming eyes fixed on her, and she thought, If they go without me it will be worse for him. It's so long since I've seen him. I am

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all in the dark. I do not know the truth about him. But if I go, I shall know. Even if Jude and Joseph and Simon hate him, even if James is persuaded that he is lost, even though they are all his enemies, I must go, and when I go I shall find out for myself. And so at last she said that she would go with them.

## Chapter Four

**S**O THEY took the road to Capernaum once again, but now it was winter and the wind sweeping down from the snowy Lebanons howled in their faces as they crossed the bleak moorland, beating them back and buffeting them and nearly blowing Mary from her donkey. James stalked ahead like some great winged creature of the desert, his hair and beard streaming in the wind, his robe whipping and flapping round his skinny legs. Joseph, Jude and Simon followed the beast that carried their mother. Four rough, north-country men, poor, proud, stubborn and pious; provincial Jews, men of their time, living their small lives in a world full of devils and angels and sorcerers who dealt with devils and performed miracles; upright men, builders and tillers of the soil who worshipped the one invisible God and carried on the struggle for existence with evil spirits lurking in every running brook and flowering shrub, waiting to ensnare their souls and strange gods who drank the blood of children enshrined all about on the hilltops in magic groves; narrow men, small men, obstinate, serious, democrats, members of the commonwealth of Israel and peculiar in all the eastern world by virtue of their blood and their religion. And the camel-drivers from Arabia, the merchants homeward-bound for Tyre and Sidon, the Syrians and the Greeks who passed them on the road, looked on them with aversion because they were Jews, and a Roman officer, riding at the head of



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his company, passed them with a sneer on his face. And Mary huddled herself in her shawl, bowing her head against the wind, and didn't look up, nor did her sons salute these idolaters but plodded on, their eyes on the ground. And over their sullen heads a great drama was preparing that was to be the last final tragedy of their people.

The Kingdom of Heaven was not coming in their generation as their glorious brother and his grim fore-runner, John the Baptizer, had proclaimed. But a day of judgment was coming and their children were to see it make an end of a world. A day more dreadful than any their race had ever endured under Nebuchadnezzar or Cyrus the Persian or Antiochus, the madman of Syria. It was to dawn just forty years later and there would be on that day no Judas Maccabeus to gather the people together and calling on his soldiers to fight for the Law, the temple, the city, the country and the commonwealth, deliver the nation from their enemies. There would be instead, a dozen vainglorious madmen to lead them to disaster. And when the day ended there would be no commonwealth, no city and no temple, they would be a people without a country, with nothing left of their own but the holy Law that they would carry with them when they fled into exile.

For the God of Israel was not going to establish his chosen people, in their generation, as lords of the whole world and set up his rule of righteousness and peace from one end of the world to another. He was going to scatter them to the uttermost parts of the earth, and Cæsar was going to hold undisputed sway over what remained of lovely Galilee and the rubble heap that had once been the holy city of Judea. But no one knew this save Mary's son, Jesus, who should have been their saviour, for John the

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Baptizer was dead and there was no other prophet left in the land.

His brothers were afraid, but not of the desolate truth. They did not know that even as they battled on against the wind, the fate of their nation was being decided down by the lake where a throng listened to a solitary voice. They could see no writing in the heavens, they could hear no sound from the world that lay beyond. Indeed, they could see nothing save a stretch of stony road, some ragged thorn bushes straining at the roots and scurries of whirling dust; and they said to themselves, We must protect him against himself. We must take him if necessary by force and put an end, once and for all, to his infamous activities. For they didn't understand what he was trying to do. They couldn't conceive of him as concentrating in his own person the safety and pride of the people of Israel; nor did they ask themselves what the result would be were the whole world to believe him and act on his words. What they feared was not that he might fail but that he might succeed.

Nevertheless it was true that he was pointing the way to a new heaven on earth and James at least was to realise the truth when it was too late to help him. But now when he needed help, when he was being carried by the great forces within and without him toward a crisis on which hung the fate of the Jews, James thought of him as a very sinful man and his mother feared that he was out of his mind, and his other brothers said to themselves: Once he was a good workman and a good citizen who kept the Law, and supported his mother by the honest sweat of his brow, now he has become just another sorcerer who will surely be cast into prison, and they were hurrying on to find him so that they might undo him.

But when at last they came down from the wintry

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plateau into the warm soft air of the valley and saw lovely Capernaum at their feet and the blue lake beyond all dotted with sails, they didn't know what to do or where to go to look for him. They knew he had a house of his own in the town, but they didn't know where it was and Capernaum was a big, busy city, very different from Nazareth. So the brothers stopped by the customs house just outside the town and stood by the side of the road debating among themselves what they should do, and their mother waited on her donkey half-dead for weariness, but her eyes were burning in her exhausted face with anxious eagerness.

They had no friends in the city. They knew no one save Simon Peter and the sons of Zebedee who had taken them in on their last visit for Jesus's sake and they could not go back this time to the fisherman's house where they had been received as friends for they didn't come as friends.

Jude said, That is as may be, what need of so much delicacy? We've business to do that needs doing. We will not lodge with these people, but I can at least go ahead while you wait here and ask one of the women where our brother lives.

But Simon said, It will surely seem a very strange thing to Peter's wife and her mother that Jesus's own mother and brothers should not know where to find him.

And Joseph said it were wiser not to let his friends know of their arrival lest they warn him. And when he had said that, they all moved a little way off from their mother and turned their backs lest she should overhear what they said. But she wasn't listening and she didn't understand the delay that kept her sitting there outside the city where he lived. She watched the people passing through eyes dazed with weariness.

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So many people, all intent on their own affairs, they came pouring down the road from Damascus, and what a scene of confusion it was outside the customs house with all the camels and asses being unloaded, all their merchandise strewn in the dust and the drivers all wrangling with the tax collectors and calling on some god or other and wringing their hands.

Why did her sons keep her waiting? Jesus was here in this place. Soon, oh soon she would see him. But when she saw him, what then? She was sick with longing and apprehension. She did not know what he would do or what his brothers would do. They looked like conspirators over there with their heads together. Why did they not ask someone the way? If she could find out where he lived she could slip off by herself, get to him first. They wouldn't notice. Surely anyone could tell her. But whom should she ask?

She looked about her timidly. An old man stood near her holding a little boy by the hand. He seemed kind. Screwing up her courage, she accosted him.

Sir, she said in her gentle voice, could you tell me where Jesus lives?

He stared at her vaguely out of dim eyes.

Jesus? he queried. What Jesus?

The rabbi Jesus. He has a school in the city and many disciples.

The old man shook his head. I do not know him, he said, but if he is a rabbi they will know at the synagogue.

She was very disappointed. She thought, How curious that the old man should not even know his name. But perhaps he is a stranger in the city, as I am, and she looked about her again for some other who would tell her, but all the people were hurrying past, chattering, shouting and quarrelling, and no one paid any attention

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to her. Then suddenly she saw a familiar face and she called out, Look, James, there is the pedlar! Ask him. Oh! do ask him. And her sons turned and stared at her.

What pedlar? they said.

The pedlar from the Jordan valley who comes to Nazareth every spring, the one who first brought me news. He is sure to know where Jesus is to be found. Look, there he is by the water-trough. He is coming toward us.

And indeed it was the same man who had little painted gods for sale and pots of scented oil and trinkets, but it was evident when he came close that he did not remember her and thought, when she beckoned, that she wished to buy something out of his basket, for he held up a pair of silver ear-rings.

Yes, lady, you buy for your daughter?

No, no. It is my son that I have come to see. The great rabbi, he of whom you told me last year. Don't you remember? When you came to Nazareth after the man John had been put in prison?

I don't remember, lady, but I have heard that John is dead. You will not buy the pretty ear-rings?

No, I cannot. We are poor people. Only tell me, I beg of you— She fumbled in her purse for a penny to give the man.

Mother! James was very angry at her unseemly behaviour.

But, James, he is sure to know where Jesus lives.

Jesus the prophet? The man grinned, with his eyes on the purse in her hands.

Yes, the same. Do you know where his house is? Oh! tell me where I can find him.

I don't know which his house is, lady, but if you follow the street of the goldsmiths to its end and cross the sheep

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market you will find it behind the salt fish factory. He is a very holy man and lives among the poor.

And at last by dint of much questioning they found their way to the mean little street behind the fish factory, and a child, all in rags with a dirty face, pointed the door of his house out to them. And Mary's heart sank as she dismounted, for the walls of the house were old and battered, with plaster peeling off them, and there was much refuse in the street and a starving dog was nosing about in it. And though she had not admitted the truth to herself, she had expected to find him sitting in a beautiful white house by the lake expounding the Word of God to a circle of worshipping disciples in black gowns and fine white linen.

A porter opened to them, a strange wizened little old man, almost a dwarf, with great long arms and huge hands that nearly touched the ground, so bent was his back, and he looked up at them, when they had entered the wide, clean, white courtyard, with such a radiant smile on his ugly, crooked face that Mary felt the catch at her heart that she felt sometimes looking into the face of a very lovely child.

Peace be with you, strangers, he said.

Peace, fellow. It was James who spoke, glaring down on the happy, grinning creature. We have come to see Jesus.

The Master is not here, good sirs.

Not here?

No, he has gone on a journey across the lake. But enter, enter. I will call our mother, and he scuttled across the courtyard, his great arms dangling.

Gone! They stood in a knot inside the door, utterly confounded. Gone on a journey! They were speechless. But Jude and Joseph and Simon looked at one another angrily as if to say, Here's a pretty pass. Why didn't we

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think of this? Who would have thought of such a thing as his being gone when we've come all this way to lay hold of him? James looked at none of them. He was staring in front of him at the wide, sunny courtyard with its clean, white-washed walls and the people that lay there under the plane trees. They lay on the verandahs, too, that surrounded the courtyard, so peaceful, so weak, so happy. And a woman in a white kerchief was going from one to another with a jug and a cup in her hands, and in the far, sunny corner another woman was playing a game with some little children, but the children, too, were playing very quietly for they, too, were sick.

How white and peaceful it is. It's like a place in a dream, Mary thought, clinging to James's arm. But why isn't Jesus here and why hasn't he healed them? Perhaps it isn't true even about his powers of healing, and she whispered to James, Look, they are all sick and helpless on their beds, as if James could not see what she saw out of his sombre eyes.

But a woman was coming toward them with the queer old porter scuttling alongside her like a crab, a lovely woman with a proud, gentle carriage. Her face was bound like the other woman's in a white kerchief that covered all her hair. How beautifully she moved, like an angel borne along on wings.

The porter grinned up at her with adoring eyes. Our mother, he said, pointing a huge finger at her, and wagged his head and laughed with childish delight.

She was undisturbed. The Lord Jesus is gone on a journey, she said, but you are welcome if you will come in and rest. Belshazzar will fetch water for you, sirs, and wash your feet and bring you refreshment, if the lady will come with me. This is the hospital, but there are guest-rooms in the men's quarters. Or is your business urgent?

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she added in a different tone, noticing for the first time the harshness in the faces of the men.

Our business, said James, and he nearly choked at being obliged to converse with a strange woman, our business is with your master. Since he isn't here, we'll be off.

But James, Mary broke in, we cannot go like this. When will he return, good sister? We have come all the way from Nazareth to see him. These are his brothers and I am his mother.

O sirs! O gentle lady, why did you not tell me? Miriam, Dorcas, come quickly! Here is the mother of our Lord and here are his brothers and I did not know them. They have come all the way from Nazareth, think of it. Quick, prepare the guest-chamber, and Belshazzar, go tell Sarah in the kitchen to bring wine and fruit and whatever she has that is nice in the larder. I know there are pomegranates and figs, and I think that the lady Joanna sent a basket full of good things this very morning. But how sad the Master will be when he comes home and finds he was not here to greet you. What a pity he didn't know of your coming. He has gone to the country of the Gadarenes on the other side of the lake. He went some days ago, taking Peter with him and James and John, and the others have all gone to other places to preach. There is no one here but Dorcas and Miriam and myself and Judas Iscariot, our treasurer.

While she was talking she had been urging Mary gently toward a door at the far end of the courtyard. Come, she said, Come, dear mother of my Lord. Come into the guest-room and sit down and take off your sandals. Dorcas, bring fresh water and a soft towel. See how weary she is. Oh, see how white she is!

Mary had indeed gone white as death. For suddenly, seeing the woman kneeling at her feet in the shadowy



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room, she had recognised her. It was the harlot, of Magdala, the one who had forced her way into the house of the Pharisee to kiss Jesus's feet and wipe them with her hair before all the assembled men.

What did it mean? Oh, what did it mean? A great shuddering took her. Then she heard James's voice calling her and she got up quickly, saying: Don't, don't. I cannot stay here. I cannot, and ran out to him and clung to him shaking; and whispered, Let us go, James. Take me away. Let us go. And she thought, Pray God he doesn't recognise her.

And when the woman came out after them, looking all bewildered and distressed and calling, Will you not stay? Oh, will you not stay? she wheeled James round with her arms from the sight of her and pushed him toward the door, followed by her other sons; and Dorcas and Miriam and Mary Magdalene and all the quiet sick on their beds watched them go.

They found themselves in the dirty street where they had left the donkey tethered, and though the men did not understand what had got into their mother, they were all, except Jude, in a great hurry to leave the place, so they hoisted her quickly on to the beast's back and made off. But again, when they reached the end of the street, they didn't know where to go or what to do and they stood in the sheep market to consider among themselves.

They had very little money, but it was growing late and they must find shelter for the night. Had they been alone they would have gone outside the town and slept in a field, but their mother could not sleep in the open. They must go to an inn, Simon said. Surely they could find one in this great city that was unfrequented by Gentiles and within their humble means; and although James could not abide the thought of lodging under a roof that might

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shelter idolaters and Jude growled at the expense, saying they'd much better have stayed in their brother's house, they at length set off again in search of a night's lodging, dragging the weary beast with them and their mother on its back, and her eyes were like the eyes of a blind woman and she swayed in her saddle with exhaustion till she was like to fall to the ground.

And it seemed as if their search was to be fruitless, for all the modest inns were full and those that had room were beyond their means, and many were heathen houses given over to the entertainment of merchants and Roman officials. But at last, after making a circuit of the whole city, they found a dingy hostelry kept by one of their own race, quite close to the sheep market whence they had started out, and the landlord, after much wrangling with Jude over the price, agreed to give their mother a room and let them sleep at the back in the loft over the stable for what they could afford to pay.

It was a mean room over the kitchen where they put their mother. But by that time Mary was like one in a stupor and noticed nothing and could do nothing but drag herself to the wretched bed and lie down there. And indeed it was not until evening of the next day that she took account of her surroundings and then like one half asleep. And when her sons came to tell her that they had decided to wait, if need be, another day for their brother's return, she did not move from her pallet, but accepted what they said like one in a dream, so they put water beside her and a piece of bread and a cake of dry figs and left her.

She didn't know how long she lay there in that strange, close room with its four grimy walls. Sometimes she would hear the voices of the servants in the kitchen underneath her and the smell of food cooking would come in at the small window to choke her, and once she murmured to

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herself. There was no room in the inn. They lodged in a stable. And she remembered Bethlehem and another stable that was sweet with the smell of hay where she had wrapped a little boy in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger. And when she remembered this, she turned herself on her bed and wept a long time; she didn't know how long.

But at last her sons called her. She must get up, they said, speaking through the door. The people were pouring out of town. Jesus had come back from the other side of the lake and was preaching in a little village only a few miles away. The roads were black with folk going to hear him. James had seen the disciple Judas of Kerioth, and Judas had told him that he did not know if their brother would come to Capernaum. They never knew when to expect him. Often he did not come back for many days, but moved on from village to village; or he would withdraw suddenly from everyone into the mountains. She must dress herself. They must follow with all the people and they must make speed otherwise they might miss him again. Judas the disciple would go with them. He had a cart she could ride in.

So she dressed herself hurriedly and came down to the door of the inn and found her sons waiting with a strange man who saluted her gravely in the polished accents of the south, and helped her into his donkey-cart as if she were a very great lady. And it seemed to her as they drove through the gay streets of the town as if she had been ill with a fever for many days and were come back to the world from the dark twilight that is near the region of the shadow of death. And her heart began to beat quickly at the thought of seeing her son once again and a faint colour came back to her grey, wasted cheeks, and her great sunken eyes began to shine. For she could think of nothing

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and remember nothing that could subdue the irrepressible joy that surged in her at the thought of seeing him. And though she kept telling herself that she would have need of all her maternal authority in dealing with her five men, so that there would be no quarrel and no dreadful scene of dispute between the four who were with her and the one they were going to find, she could not help smiling at James and Jude and Joseph and Simon. She didn't know that one of them carried a stout rope wound round his waist under his tunic, nor that they had agreed between them to bind Jesus and give him in custody if he refused to come with them, and she had clean forgotten about his being cast out of the synagogue. Indeed, even had her wits not been all in confusion, it would have been difficult for her that morning to think of him as a friendless outcast execrated by all the world, for all the world was hurrying to greet him. They found themselves, when they got outside the town, in such a throng of people that it was like going up to Jerusalem to a feast, save that there were many carts on the road carrying sick folk and many old men being helped along by young men and many blind being led by little children. But they were singing all along the road as they sang going up to the feast of the Pass-over.

*Sing aloud unto God our strength.*

*Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.*

*Take a psalm and bring hither the timbril, the pleasant harp with the psalter.*

Even the blind were singing and the sick, singing in their thin, quavering voices with all the strength they could muster. Far ahead and far behind you could hear the music rising above the trees to the blue sky.

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Is it all for him? Are they all going to see him? she asked timidly of the dark, stern man beside her.

Yes, and they dare accuse him of sorcery. He casts out devils with the help of devils. That's the best thing they could think of. That's how they hope to undo him.

His cultured voice was harsh with suppressed excitement; he spoke with a strange, dry vehemence, biting off his words. Hypocrites, vipers. They don't believe a word of it. They know as I do that Jesus is the Deliverer, the anointed Son of God, and they are afraid.

He pointed his thin scholar's hand, Look! There are thousands and every day there are more thousands. Wherever he is, they run breathless, panting, like thirsty sheep to sweet waters. Does Beelzebub draw men like this?

His queer eyes gleamed, his bitter mouth was scornful, he seemed to brood on the seat beside her, and when he spoke again it was as if he spoke to himself.

The old order and the new. Soon the clash will come. It was bound to come and now it is coming. He knows it. He is being carried toward it in spite of himself. Forces within and without him are at work. He feels them. He feels the crisis approaching. I can tell by his voice, by what he says. Listen. That sound is the prelude.

She listened.

Oh give thanks unto the Lord. Call upon His name.

Sing unto Him. Sing psalms unto Him, talk ye of all His wondrous works.

He has remembered His covenant, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations.

He remembered His holy promise.

And He brought forth His people with joy.

Praise ye the Lord. Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever.

Old and young, fathers and mothers and little children

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all lifted up their voices as they followed the road above the shining lake and bands of young men making great speed passed, calling to the people. Onward, soldiers of Jesus. Make haste lest we reach him before you. And many an old man waved to them with the light of fiery youth gleaming in his faded eyes. But James and Joseph and Simon and Jude tramped on silently behind the donkey-cart, their faces grim, their eyes on the ground.

## Chapter Five

**T**HE religious revival in the lake country had received the impetus needed to transform it into a rebellion. The excitement among Jesus's followers had risen to fever-pitch and many devout men among the Jews, who had remained unconvinced by his preaching, were now ready to join him, for news had come that Herod had put to death that great and holy man of Israel, John the Baptizer.

John's disciples had come from the south telling the dreadful thing, and the news had travelled like a wind along the crowded shores of the lake, and all the country was roused to passionate anger. For it was said that the murder had been done in the fortress of Maechara, at a feast given in honour of Herod's unlawful wife, Herodias. And some said that the Queen had conspired with her daughter to destroy John because he had dared denounce her and that she had made Herod drunk and that the evil Princess Salome had danced before him till he was mad with desire for her and demanded as the price of her dancing the head of the prophet. It was even whispered that the holy head had been brought into the feast on a golden platter.

And all the most sober men among the Jews believed the story for they hated Herod and loathed the life of his licentious court and the great temptations Herod placed in the way of the people of Israel with his races and his gladiatorial combats. And there were many good Pharisees

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among them who knew that the tetrarch would be glad to break down the faith of their nation and make them into a race of slavish idolaters, and many even of those who had thought little of John the Baptizer while he was alive, hailed him as a mighty prophet now that he was dead. And when word went round that Jesus would surely avenge him, they made ready to join themselves to him; while among Jesus's own followers men were saying:

John was the one who was to herald the coming of the Deliverer, and John is dead but the Deliverer is here.

And so it came about that a great multitude was come together north of Capernaum to welcome him on his return from the country of the Gadarenes; and when word came that he was there, men had run throughout the whole region round and begun to carry about in beds those that were sick. For it was their custom now wheresoever he entered into villages or cities or country to lay the sick in the streets where he was to pass by, so that they might touch him and be made whole.

But Peter and James and John had come back filled with indignation at the way the people on the other side of the lake had treated their master, and they told what had happened among the Gadarenes.

Look you, they said, the Master had scarce come out of the ship on the other side when a man came running to meet him who had his dwelling among the tombs and no man could bind him, no not with chains, because he had often been bound with fetters and chains and had plucked the chains asunder and broke the fetters in pieces. Neither could any man tame him, and always night and day he was in the mountains and in the tombs crying and cutting himself with stones. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him and cried with a loud voice and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou son of the most



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high God? And when the Master said to the devil in him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit, he cried out again saying, I adjure thee by God that thou torment me not. And Jesus asked him, What is thy name? and he answered, My name is legion for we are many. And he implored Jesus not to send them away out of the country. And there was a herd of swine feeding a good way off and the devils besought the Master saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go into the herd of swine, and he said to them, Go, and they went into the herd and behold the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea and perished in the water. And they that kept them fled into the city and the country and told everything, and the people came to Jesus from all the country round to see what he had done. But hark, and the faces of the disciples darkened as they spoke for they could not bear to have their master offended, hark to what came to pass among the Gadarenes. When they saw the man sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, they were afraid. The whole multitude besought the Master to depart out of their coast for they were taken with a great fear, and he went up again into the ship and so we came back.

And when they heard the story of the Gadarenes, those who loved Jesus, and who were already roused by the death of John, were moved to great indignation. But the doctors of law who had come to provoke him were very glad, for they feared him as they had feared John, as they would fear any man who stirred up the people and undermined their own authority, and they were desperately anxious now to catch some word out of his mouth that was blasphemous so that they could bring him to trial. And though they were devout Pharisees, these men, out of fear and hatred of Jesus, had joined the Herodians to bring about his death, but they could do nothing unless

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they could prove that he was guilty of treason against God, and the Herodians dared not touch him because of the temper of the people.

And indeed one word from him that day would have transformed the multitude into an army ready to march on the castle of Tiberius to avenge John and die fighting for the Kingdom of Heaven. But he did not say the word. He began instead to lay down once more and explain the new law of love that was more difficult to follow than all the Laws of Moses and the rabbis put together.

You have heard how it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery, but I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out. If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off. Better that one of your members should perish than that your whole body should be cast into hell.

And you have been taught to love your neighbours and hate your enemies, but I say unto you, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you and pray for them that use you despitefully and persecute you, that you may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven.

And those who had come expecting him to call on them to rise and avenge John, were angry; and the Zealots, who were waiting for him to proclaim himself the Messiah, were dismayed; and the Pharisaic doctors were exasperated, for there was nothing in the new law that they could take hold of to accuse him; and even his disciples began to murmur among themselves.

Would he have us love Herod and Pontius Pilate? Are we to become brothers to the heathen who pour out their children's blood before Moloch?

And reading their hearts he was filled with despair at

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their failure to understand, and he looked all about him, in the dense mass of men and women that thronged the house where he was, for one face that was lighted with the light of Heaven, and he saw instead dull faces, stupid, sullen and perplexed faces, and faces that were ravaged by sorrow and others that were fat and greedy and others that were mean and spiteful. And the learned men of the schools in their black gowns sneered at him from their seats of honour, and the fiery young men in the back of the hall, who had climbed on to benches, were leaning forward like animals ready to spring on him; and he cried out to them with vehemence:

Hark, everyone of you. Let this sink into your ears. He who will save his life shall lose it, but he who shall lose his life for my sake shall save it.

What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

I am come to send fire on the earth. Did you suppose that I had come to bring peace? I am come to bring not peace but a sword.

And they were like deaf men who could not hear what he was saying, and he cried out again endeavouring to pierce their deafness.

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

If any man cometh unto me and hate not his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

And even as he was talking in this way to the people, his own mother and brothers were approaching the place where he was with that strange grim disciple from Judea,

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Judas Iscariot, who perhaps of all the twelve understood best the crisis that was approaching.

It was not a good moment to try to persuade him to give up his activities and go back to his carpenter's bench in Nazareth, nor was it a moment well chosen to lay hold of him and give him in custody. In fact, his family could not have chosen a more unfortunate time and place for their business. But they didn't know this, and though the brothers had heard men talking in the inn where they had lodged of the death of John the Baptizer, they had not thought it a matter of any great consequence, nor were they capable of understanding the conflicting passions that surged in the people. How could they understand? Wasn't he their own brother? And were they not insignificant men?

It had seemed to them perfectly natural that in Capernaum all the world went its way ignoring his existence. It seemed to them now well nigh incredible that all the world adored him. And they had no shadow of an inkling of the strain he was under. They had not heard of his being driven out from the country of the Gadarenes. It hadn't been explained to them how the scribes were baiting him and even now conspiring with Herod's men to kill him. Nor did they understand how the agitation of the Zealots on his behalf interfered with his real business of saving the people, and how very often when the multitude that thronged him were ready to fall down and worship him as their divinely anointed king, he would be filled with despair and leave them suddenly and go away alone in the mountains. And it never occurred to them that in the midst of his apparent triumph he was bitterly disappointed and very lonely. For they didn't understand him or know him. They couldn't even understand why, if he could heal by miracles, he laboured over the

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sick and cared for them and nursed the weak ones slowly back to health, though the disciple Judas could have told them that not all his cures were instantaneous and permanent. Nor were they capable of understanding how he had made such a dwarf as Belshazzar, who could scarcely reach up to undo the bolts, the door-keeper of his house in Capernaum, just because doing so would make the weak-minded deformed creature feel himself a great stout fellow worthy of grave responsibility. In fact they knew nothing about their brother that was true, save that he was in danger and the kind of danger they feared was to him of no consequence.

Herod had put to death the one man in all Jewry who could have understood him, and even John had gone to his death doubting him.

Art thou he that should come or do we look for another? From his distant prison on the borders of Arabia, John had asked the question and Jesus had sent back his proud answer.

Go and show John again the things you hear and see. The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the good news preached to them.

But John, who had once baptized him, whose voice crying alone in the wilderness of Judea had reached him in Nazareth, John, whose cry he had taken up in the length and breadth of the land, had sent him no blessing, no word of belief or encouragement, no further message of any kind, and now he was gone, beheaded in the far fortress of Maechara, by the order of Herod, and his friends had told Jesus that that same Herod was after him.

Go and tell that fox, Behold I cast out devils and I do cures to-day and to-morrow and the third day I have finished.

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That was what he had said when they told him and no man knew what he meant, not even his disciples. Often during these days he would speak strange, passionate words that neither they nor any man could understand. But they all saw that he was changed.

Whereas in the early days of the summer he had had power to heal all who touched him and had claimed authority to forgive sins, he had now passed on that power to his disciples and was sending them out to heal in his name and they did, for his very name was enough now to perform miracles. And whereas he had defended his claims to authority by appealing to the scriptures, he now commanded men to believe in him if they would be saved, and attacked the masters of the synagogue openly before all the people, accusing them of exploiting the poor, of making a great show of religion while they cared for nothing but money and worldly honour; and he upbraided them vehemently saying, How can you love God when you honour only one another? The honour of men is abominable to God. And he prophesied disaster to these great men of the synagogue and warned the people against these blind men to whom they had always given a blind obedience. If the blind lead the blind, then both will fall into the ditch. And the people swayed by his fiery eloquence would surge after him saying, No man ever spoke like this man, nor could the Messiah himself do greater works than he. But when the scribes, who could not deny his miracles, whispered that he was in league with the powers of darkness they would recoil again.

It was the synagogue's one deadly weapon against him. In it lay their one hope of destroying his influence with the people, and they used it on that day when his mother and brothers were coming to lay hold on him.

They brought to him a man possessed with a devil who

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was blind and dumb and he healed him in so much that the blind and dumb both spoke and saw: and all the people who had listened without understanding were amazed when they beheld the great miracle, and said among themselves, Surely he is the son of David, the one who was to come to deliver us. But the Pharisaic doctors said, This fellow casts out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of devils. And Jesus, knowing what they were whispering, rose up before all the people and accused them of blasphemy, and he addressed his enemies, crying out in a voice of great authority:

Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation. No city nor house divided against itself can stand. If Satan cast out Satan he is divided against himself, how then shall his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your pupils cast them out?

But if I cast out devils by the spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come and that beyond doubt.

Let the people judge. Let them choose.

He that is not with me is against me; he that does not help me, destroys what I am doing.

And I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit of God shall not be forgiven.

And whosoever speaketh a word against me, the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

And he was terribly moved and his face was awful to look on as he spoke, and when they still questioned him, seeing how moved he was, egging him on to provoke him and catch him under the stress of the conflict, asking him for a sign, he turned on them very angry and said:

No sign shall be given you, you generation of vipers, save

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the sign of Jonas. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment on this generation and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold a greater than Jonas is here; and the queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment day with this generation and shall condemn it for she came from the uttermost part of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and behold a greater than Solomon is here.

And while he was talking his mother and his brothers arrived at the door of the house where he was. But they could not get in for the crowd. Indeed, there was such a throng of people outside pressing to get in that all the street was full and the sons of Zebedee had to stand at the door to keep the people back lest they trample on those inside. And Judas could do nothing for there was no room inside for anyone, no matter who he was. So they stood outside in the crowd waiting, and James managed to work his way through the crowd as far as the door, and he addressed the disciples standing there, saying:

Tell Jesus that his mother and brothers are here and desire to speak with him.

But the sons of Zebedee were so taken up with keeping back the press of the people that they seemed not to hear him, and he had to repeat what he said in a loud voice for all the people round the door were calling for Jesus and some had begun to sing again and others were shouting Hosannah and holding a meeting of their own. But at last when the Zebedees had obtained quiet they promised to send in word, and the word was passed in from one to another, Your mother and your brothers are without and are asking for you.

But he didn't come out or send for them to come in to him and James had to go back and tell the others who were waiting at a distance under the trees. And after they



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had waited there a long time the brothers began to grow angry and even his mother became annoyed. But what could they do? Judas had left them. He had disappeared in the crowd. No one knew who they were or paid any attention to them. And more and more people kept coming, bringing the sick and the blind and the cripples and epileptics, until all the space under the trees was covered with stretchers. But they couldn't find out from any one how long he was likely to stay in the house talking to the people.

We do not know, one said. We must wait till he comes. There is nothing to do but wait if your mother would be healed.

And the stranger who had brought a crippled child to see Jesus, looked kindly at Mary who did indeed appear as if she were exhausted by sickness.

And so they waited with all the sick lying round on their beds under the trees and the maimed and the beggars with sores on which flies settled in swarms. And there was a woman near by who seemed to be dying and her husband, who was with her, kept praying in a whisper with the tears streaming down his face while he held her hand, Oh, come Lord Jesus. Oh, come quickly. And all about them was the sound of sighing and moaning and whispered prayers and the whimpering of weak, ailing children, and Mary forgot what she had come for and began to cry to her son softly in her heart for all these poor people, saying, Come and heal them. Oh, why do you not come? And James stood above her with a face ravaged and haggard, for he had begun at last to doubt the lawfulness of his errand against his brother. But the others grew more and more angry as the hours passed, until at last Jude forced his way to the door again and questioned the disciple who stood there, saying angrily:

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Why does he not come out to us? Did you tell him his mother was here and desired to speak with him?

Yes, the disciple had sent in the message.

Well, what did he say? Did he say how long he was going to keep us waiting?

No, he had not said how long he would be.

What then did he say? Did he not even send an answer?

And the disciple said, looking at him strangely:

No, he sent you no message.

And a young man who was standing just inside the door turned at that and said to Jude:

I will tell you what he said. When they told him that his mother and brothers were without, he said, Who is my mother and my brother? and he looked about him at all the assembled people and he said, so that even I standing at the back could hear him, He who doeth the will of him that sent me, he is my mother and my sister and my brother.

And Jude went hot with anger and he went back with his face flaming and reported to the others what Jesus had said before all the people, and he swore that he should suffer for this insult to his mother and he undid the rope round his waist and made it all ready in his hand saying, We must wait now until night if necessary and lay hold of him when he comes out.

But Joseph said angrily, Put up that rope. His disciples would fall on us. Those sons of Zebedee are strong men.

And Simon said, There is nothing for it but to go to the authorities and get them to take him in custody.

But Mary, who was shaking as if with a deadly chill, implored them to come away.

And while they were wrangling among themselves what they should do, all the people began pouring out of the meeting talking excitedly one to another, and all the sick

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began to stir in their beds and some lifted themselves on their elbows with a great yearning hope lighting their eyes and the brothers became silent and stood together watching the door with their mother weeping on the ground behind them.

But he did not come out, even when the last man had left the hall. And presently word went round that he was gone, no one knew where, and they saw then that even the sons of Zebedee had disappeared and a stranger was closing up the door. So they had to come away as did those who had brought the sick with them. But the husband, whose wife lay dying under the trees, did not move from the place beside her where he knelt holding her hand.

And so once again they took the dreadful road across the moor, and as they climbed it the four men commiserated with their mother over the dreadful injury her eldest son had done her, and they quoted a proverb of their people about a thankless child and a serpent's tooth. But what Mary felt was very different from the poisonous pain of a serpent's bite and what she remembered was the long procession of the sick going away disappointed, and she thought, Perhaps they would have been saved if it hadn't been for me. Perhaps Jesus would have come out to them.

And she saw again the man kneeling beside his wife who was dying. She was to remember for many days the look on his face as she passed him.

## Chapter Six

**S**HE was back in Nazareth when the excitement in the lake country reached its climax. At the moment when the national and religious revival swept the people of the valley to the feet of her son on a great surging wave of enthusiasm to break against his will and recoil, she was sitting on her bench in the courtyard behind the carpenter's shop with her sewing in her lap and her grandchildren playing at her feet.

A frail little old woman huddled in a shabby shawl, she sat there putting a patch into an old threadbare garment, her withered eyelids lowered over tragic eyes, and the sounds of the people passing in the street came to her faintly as if from a great distance and the far thundering of throngs pouring down the highways of the world reached her not at all.

Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee: Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great and favourite of the progressive party among the Jews: Tiberius Cæsar and his minister, the great prefect Sejanus, who had governed all the Roman Empire since his gloomy master was retired to the island of Capri: what did she know of these men? They were but names to her. Even Sejanus's creature, Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judea, was little more than a name. Hated, feared, everyone of them, and, with the exception of young Agrippa, known throughout Israel as enemies, they were yet so far removed from her deep,

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obscure, little life that they seemed to her more like dread supernatural beings than living men. Indeed it never occurred to her to think that they were anxious, greedy, troubled men, driven by passion as were the little men of Nazareth. She didn't wonder how they lived or ever ask whether Rome was a bigger, finer city than Jerusalem or how far it was across the great sea to the island of Capri. She had never beheld any sea but the sea of Galilee nor any ships larger than the fishing-boats that were moored to the quay in Capernaum; and she could not have believed, even had she been told it, that the fate of her eldest son was involved in the relations of these great, terrible men one with another: and yet it was so.

There had been trouble again in Judea and Herod the tetrarch was angry with Pilate, for Pilate's troops had killed some Galilean subjects of Herod's in a new tumult in Jerusalem. There was a man, too, called Barabbas, an insurrectionist, who was organising still another rebellion in Judea; and Caiaphas, the high priest, with that venerable man, Annas, his father-in-law who had been high priest himself and was still the power behind the invisible throne of the temple, was conspiring with the Roman, for both these mighty men were secretly in fear of the excitable people whom they had been plundering in the name of God. They had amassed vast riches out of the gifts that poured into the sacred shrine and, though the people of the provinces looked on them still with awe, the Judeans knew they were corrupt and hated them.

But Mary knew none of these things; for though spring was come again and the almond trees were in bloom and all her neighbours were bustling about visiting and gossiping, she never went out of the courtyard, and often her own family didn't notice her for she would creep away when they began to wrangle among themselves. And when

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the pedlar came with his news of the great world she hid herself in her closet; she couldn't bear to look at him, and he didn't stay long this time for there was no money in the house now to spend on trinkets. Indeed, thanks to Jesus, so they all said, there was scarcely enough to buy bread, and they would look at her as they said it with angry, malevolent eyes. But she did not look up to meet their eyes or speak to them of what she was feeling, only sat quietly hiding herself from them, until it was almost as if she were invisible sitting there in the spring sunlight, no more noticeable in any case than a little grey shadow.

The shadow of a woman against the wall of a stricken house, mother of a family accursed, she was to come to life before long. Even now a new life was stirring in her and a new determination forming that was to drag her to her feet and drive her out from her home, her family and her church.

For she had learned something important concerning herself, when Jesus had refused to come to her, namely, that no hurt he could do her nor anything he could ever do or say to anyone could divide her from him. Whatever he did that was unlawful or whatever he said that was blasphemous, it would always be for her as if she herself were breaking the Law and uttering blasphemy; and whatever his punishment it would be the same as if she were punished and guilty. For she was a mother in Israel with the blood of desert tribes in her veins. She would not be asked to die for her faith, as other women of her race had done, but she was going to be asked to abandon that faith and lose her eternal soul for her son's sake and she was almost ready.

She was going up to Jerusalem and was going to see Pilate from the edge of a crowd that howled to him to crucify her Jesus, but Pilate would not know she was there

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or even be aware that she existed. Nevertheless his fear for himself was going to involve her in a drama that was to make him known throughout the world for as long as men remembered her son. For Pontius Pilate had need now of Herod. He must make friends with the tetrarch or be undone.

Up to the present though he was only a procurator, he had had no one over him in Syria. Lucian, the governor of all that great province, had never come to take up his office and Pilate had been accountable for his administration only to Sejanus. And as long as Sejanus ruled, Pilate had known that he could deal as harshly as he chose with the detestable fanatics of his frontier province, for Sejanus hated the Jews. Nor had he felt it necessary to disguise his contemptuous hostility to Herod, for Sejanus had a personal feud with all the Herods. But now Sejanus was dead, Tiberius had returned suddenly to Rome, arrested, tried and sentenced his minister who had tampered with the army and hoped to supplant him; and Pilate, Sejanus's man, was trembling in his palace at Cæsarea. His position was become parlous. A new governor of all Syria was appointed over him, one Lucius Pomponius Flaccus, a great noble and intimate of the emperor's and Tiberius had ordered an inquiry into the administration of the province. Who would say a good word for Pilate? He had been a bad governor; the people hated him; he had offended the tetrarch of Galilee; he was not even popular with his own troops. The two Syrian legions had remained loyal to the emperor. When Sejanus commanded them to put his image on their standards they had refused. They were the sixth, raised by Mark Antony himself, and the tenth, and they were now rewarded by Tiberius for their loyalty.

Pilate could expect no reward. If he were not careful

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he could expect, instead, disgrace and dismissal. His only friends and allies in Judea were the high priests, Annas and Caiaphas and the rest of the Sadducees who would make up to him so long as they thought he was in favour with Cæsar. But Flaccus had arrived in Antioch and had already established an understanding with young Herod Agrippa who had been brought up in Rome and was the friend of the heir apparent to the emperor. Pilate must move cautiously. He must seize the first opportunity that offered to ingratiate himself with the tetrarch, otherwise his days as procurator were assuredly numbered.

How could Mary know that her son would provide Pilate with his opportunity? How could she have conceived of the Roman as a petty official, trembling in his shoes, or ever dream that he was in constant communication with the high priest of Israel as to how to keep the people quiet? She knew nothing of political intrigues or the rivalries of governors and tetrarchs. Had anyone told her that Annas and his son-in-law were on the watch during the holy feast days for such dangerous political agitators as Barabbas and Jesus of Nazareth, she would not have believed it. For she knew her son and she believed that Caiaphas was a very holy man responsible only to God for the souls of the people.

And when at last she heard of the uprising in the valley, she did not know what to believe, for it seemed to her a mockery that the people should have wanted to crown her son king. She knew very well that her husband was a descendant of the house of David, but so were many other modest men scattered through the country in farms, vineyards and villages. The house of David had been a great house, the strong blood of the shepherd king still ran in many sturdy veins, so how could one argue from Joseph's genealogy that Jesus was the king Messiah promised by



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God to free Israel from Cæsar, Herod, Pilate, Flaccus and all and every oppressor? It was of no such destiny as this that she had dreamed. No angel had ever come to tell her that her son would be a warrior, nor had her glorious hopes for him ever had to do with any earthly kingdom.

What then did he mean, she asked herself, when he talked of the Kingdom of Heaven?

It was written in the book of the prophet Daniel: I saw in the night visions and behold one like the Son of Man came with Clouds of Heaven. And there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom that all people, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. But she could not understand what this glorious promise had to do with her son who was a heretic and an enemy of the holy Law.

She didn't hear of the uprising until Jesus had dealt with it and it had become no more than an abortive attempt at rebellion by a band of fanatical patriots; and she heard of it just after the decree of execration was read out over Jesus in the synagogue and it was Nathan who spread the tale and his telling of it made a story that she knew was not true.

She was spared the hearing of the malediction, but she heard the trumpets that announced it, for they rang out over the roofs of the town. The rabbi of Nazareth had sent to warn them that the priest would read out the anathema and had freed them from the obligation to attend the synagogue that sabbath day and all the family had shut themselves up in the house and she had locked herself away from them in her closet back of the kitchen, but even there she had heard the awful blast of the

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trumpet. For it had been after all the most fearful anathema that was proclaimed with the sounding of trumpets over Jesus, the son of Joseph of Nazareth.

Let nothing good come out of him, let his end be sudden, let all creatures become his enemies, let the whirlwind crush him, the fever and every other malady and the edge of the sword smite him, let his death be unforeseen and drive him into outer darkness.

Those were the words said over Jesus and all the congregation heard them and all the town knew now that any man who believed in him or befriended him would, by so doing, become himself an outcast.

And it was then that Nathan the scribe had gone running through the streets swollen to bursting with excitement and had forced his way importantly among the leading men of the place who were gathered at the gate, to tell them the story of the uprising at Bethsaida and he had accosted first one, then another, saying:

Have you heard of the fate of this outcast fellow, Jesus, who set himself up as a Messiah? I have the news from a kinsman in the valley. It happened in Bethsaida Julia, in the territory of the tetrarch Philip, at the head of the lake where the Jordan flows into the sea of Galilee. This townsman of ours being at heart a coward like all false prophets had fled there to escape from Antipas, and a great rabble had followed him. So many that he thought his moment had come and the time ripe for an uprising and he dispensed bread like a great Roman consul to all the throng and harangued them, calling on them to put their trust in him and make him their leader. But when the mob rose and would have seized him and crowned him king, he was afraid and fled from them into the mountains, abandoning his disciples, who were forced to escape alone in their ship. And now the people who were ready to wor-

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ship him so long as he fed them, hate him, and all those whom he had led astray by his false promises, have left him and are flocking back to the masters of the synagogue. Even those who had become his disciples and had learned his tricks of healing are scuttling for safety into the fold since he is made an outcast; and he, the great magician, is now a fugitive with a price on his head. Do you remember how he came here, how he tried to perform his miracles? What man in Nazareth ever believed in him? We knew him too well to be fooled. Praise God we are at last delivered from the ridiculous impostor. It will be many a long day before he dares appear again in Galilee.

And many people in the town believed what Nathan told them and all the men of substance who remembered the last rebellion under Judah, the Galilean, were glad when they heard the tale, for they recalled how Varus had marched from Antioch with his legions to raze Zepphoris, Judah's birthplace, to the ground. And they said, Had this Jesus, who was brought up in our town, led the people in rebellion, Flaccus would have done the same to Nazareth. And they were all filled with hatred for the family of the man who would have brought destruction upon their homes, and no man of position in Nazareth would salute James or his brothers any longer, but turned aside when he met any one of them, and the women did likewise to their wives.

But old Anna came storming into the courtyard behind the shop, brandishing her stick and shouting, Mary, mother of Jesus, where are you? Have you heard the lies that are being spread through the town concerning your son? And she upbraided James to his face and all the others for abandoning their brother. For old Anna was afraid of no one, not even of the master of the synagogue. As for James, hadn't she dandled the great, shaggy man on her knees

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when he was a squealing infant, and hadn't she delivered Mary of Simon during the very rebellion they were all talking about?

Bah, she said to them. You don't remember, but I do, and so does your mother. Joseph locked us in that very room and stood guard in the courtyard night and day. Jesus was ten years old. He was a fine sturdy lad, I can tell you: but you, James, were a sickly creature. Nazareth was full of drunken soldiers hunting for rebels. We could hear their feet on the roof and once a scream rent the air over our very heads. Your mother was lying white and still on her bed. I was sitting with Simon here on my lap and you, James, were praying in the corner, but Jesus, when he heard the scream, crossed to his mother's side. He had a wooden sword in his hand that Joseph had made him and he stood like a soldier by his mother's bed and she smiled at me, Don't you remember, Mary?, and said, Don't be afraid, Anna, Jesus will protect us. And after that the soldiers went away south to Jerusalem to crucify two thousand rebels, and you, James, thought your prayers had saved your mother, but Jesus would have fought for her with his little wooden sword.

And the old woman at that fell into a great raging fit of weeping on the bench beside Mary, pounding the ground with her stick and crying out, Jesus is no coward, I tell you, and no traitor and no false prophet. It is all lies that viper Nathan has told. If he did not consent to lead the people, it is because he knows that he is not the Messiah and could bring nothing but disaster to the nation. But you, you are the mean men and cowards. What did you do the other day in Capernaum? Why did you not stay and stand by your brother? And they slunk away from her, even James could say nothing, and she stayed there beside Mary, glaring round her and brandishing her

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stick at Bathsheba, the goat, as if she would like to brain the animal, and kept muttering through her teeth, We must find out where he is and go to him. I have had a strange dream. I do not know what it means, but I know that he is in great danger.

And Mary, sitting beside the half-crazed old woman, began to tremble when she heard her muttering something about a star and Herod the Great, and saw her shaking her head and she said startled:

What is it, Anna? What are you saying to yourself?

The star. I'm thinking of the star that appeared at the time he was born.

Yes, I remember. It was brighter than any star in the heavens and it seemed to be right over the roof of the stable where we were. Joseph used to go out at night and look up at it. And those holy men who came from the east, they said it was a new star and that they had followed it.

What holy men? What are you saying?

The astrologers who came to the court of Herod looking for the child who was to be born King of the Jews. It was they who warned us to fly into Egypt.

And at that old Anna rose to her feet and shouted in the still courtyard: What have you done? The star was for a sign of the birth of the Messiah and you knew it, you who gave birth to him and brought him to manhood. You've had him here in your house. He lived here as a carpenter earning the bread you put in your mouth and you didn't know him. You, his mother, who said that you loved him! May God forgive you for what you have done.

And she strode out of the courtyard like a mad woman, and they said afterwards that she had taken the road to the north with a staff in her old hand and a bundle on her back, and shouted to the people that she was gone to find Jesus the Messiah. But Mary began pacing the floor of

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her little closet and every night she lay prostrate on the roof under the stars, praying to the God of Israel to show her the truth; and every day James read to her the inexorable, undeniable words of the Law.

And after many days, Simon her nephew came to the house of his parents with another young man called John, not the son of Zebedee but another, who was scarcely more than a boy. And her sister sent word to her to come, for they had news that she should hear. So she went to her sister's house secretly at night for fear of James's anger, and found two young men sitting with Mary, and Clophas talking of the strange things that had happened in the valley, and their story was very different from the story that Nathan had told and she knew as she listened to them that it was true.

They were on their way north, they said. Jesus had gone on before them to the borders of Tyre. They were going to join him. They had stopped to tell Simon's parents of what had happened and of how Jesus was a fugitive now, with no place to lay his head. Yes, it was true. The people of Capernaum and Bethsaida and Chorazin had turned him out; all his followers had left him, save his twelve disciples and a few women.

Young Simon was changed from the fiery youth that he had been. He was older; there were lines of suffering in his face and a new light shone in his steady eyes as he told Mary how he had abandoned the Zealots and all his dreams of national freedom to follow her son.

For Jesus has explained, he said, how foolish it is to believe that we can bring in the reign of God by force of arms. He has shown us how even we, who love him, have misunderstood him about the Kingdom of Heaven. His kingdom is not something that can be established in Jerusalem by driving out Pilate or in Tiberius by march-

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ing against Herod. It is a new state of being that must grow like a seed in the ground and take possession of men's hearts and spread secretly like leaven in dough, till all the nation is filled with the sweet love of God. Until that is accomplished of what avail to rise against Cæsar? Even had he consented to lead the people, even had he been successful, how could he have established the holy reign of peace and happiness? The people are not ready to found the Kingdom of Heaven; they are not fit to govern themselves as God's holy nation. They have grown fat, he said, and blind and corrupt. Their hearts are filled with greed and lust for possessions. They are no better than the Romans and their state would be no better, were they to be free from the Romans, but worse.

But what happened, Simon? What occurred in Bethsaida? Is it true that he filled all the people with bread?

Yes.

How many? Was it a great throng?

There must have been well on five thousand souls.

But how could he feed them all? Who would have enough money?

We will tell you just what happened and you must judge for yourselves how it was. We had gone out as you know by twos and we had come back from our preaching to tell him of what we had done, and he had decided to go away with us to a quiet place to rest awhile, for we were all very tired. So we took a ship and crossed the lake to Bethsaida Julia, meaning to go up into the mountains to be alone together, but the people saw us go and many knew him and ran on foot out of all the cities and out-went him and came together ahead of us. And when we reached the other side a great multitude was gathered in the meadows where the Jordan flows into the lake, and Jesus was moved with compassion when he saw them, for many

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were on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover and had turned aside to wait for him, and they seemed to him to be like sheep without a shepherd, and so he began to talk to them.

Where? In the meadows?

No, up above. He went up on the slope above the river and they followed him and sat down on the grass. And time fled as he talked, and no one noticed until the day was spent that night was coming. Then one of us said to him, I think it was Philip, Look! It will soon be dark. Send the people away, so that they can go into the villages and buy victuals, for this is a lonely, deserted place, and they have nothing to eat. And he said, Give them to eat. If I send them away hungry they will faint on the road for many of them have come from very far. But we said, How can we feed them? and he said, How much food have you? We had a lad with us who had brought five barley loaves and two small dried fish. It was all we had, and what was that, we said, among so many, and when he told us to divide it among them we were filled with consternation, for the people had all been moved to a great, joyous excitement by his preaching and were praising God, who had sent him to be their saviour. And we thought, If we begin to give them our little loaves they will be angry and make a mock of the Master and there may be a tumult. Nevertheless, he commanded them all to sit down on the grass by hundreds and fifties, and they sat down in ranks as he told them and he took the five loaves and broke them and the two fish likewise, and standing up before all the multitude, he lifted his face to heaven and blessed the bread with the blessing of Israel, and then he commanded us to set the bread before all the people.

Young Simon paused, caught his breath, and looked at the boy John, then continued.



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And all the meadow was covered with men and women and children, and twilight was creeping over the world, and they were singing hymns. And we began with those who were nearest, to do as he commanded us, and no one knew how it was, but when we had given what we had, we found other baskets filled with bread and others filled with fish waiting on the ground, and every soul in all that vast gathering did eat and was filled.

And Simon stopped speaking and silence filled the room and a great mystery wrapped the little group that was gathered there, and no one spoke, for they were hushed at the thought of the great miracle Jesus had done. But at last Clophas said:

And it was after this that the people would have made him their king?

Yes. When they had eaten they were themselves amazed, and they began to give thanks while we were gathering up the remnants, and began calling out to him in loud voices, hailing him as the son of David, because he had given them bread to fill their stomachs, and he was troubled and he tried to quiet them, and began to talk to them about the bread of life. But they grew more and more excited and they could not understand him in their excitement, and when he said, He who comes to me shall neither hunger nor thirst, a great shout went up from all over the hillside and the crowd rose to its feet and surged towards him crying, Hosannah, Hosannah in the Highest! and they would have seized him by force and crowned him king then and there, but he would not.

And again Simon paused and there was silence in the room. But Mary could not wait to hear the end of the story.

What happened then, Simon? Oh, what happened?

We were all standing round him, and the throng was

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surging before us as if the sea had flowed up the slope over the meadows and some had lighted torches, for it was grown dark and we thought, Now! Now it has come! The great day of our Lord is here! and we waited for him to proclaim himself the Messiah; and I heard Judas Iscariot, who stood just behind me, whispering through his teeth, He cannot gainsay them. He cannot. He must do it. But instead he turned to us suddenly and commanded us to be gone, saying in a quick, low voice, Go straight to the ship and go up into her and go before me to the other side while I send the people away, and we dared not disobey, none of us, not even Judas. We did as he told us. We left him. No one saw us go in the darkness. But looking back we could see him in the light of the torches, standing before the dark surging mass of the people, and I think it was Judas who gave a great sob near me as we stumbled down the slope in the dark.

And he sent the people away?

Yes.

But how could he? He was only one and they were five thousand.

We do not know how it was. We were out on the water. They said afterwards that he had lashed them with his tongue and accused them of believing in him only because he had fed them. When we reached the other side the next morning we found Capernaum in an uproar, and at the sight of him an angry crowd filled all the quayside, cursing him, and they would have stoned us.

But I thought you had left him. How could he be with you if you had gone before him in the ship?

He came to us.

Came to you on the water?

Yes.

The young men looked strangely at one another.

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We must tell them, Simon said, how it was. You see, Mother, and you my Father, we were very troubled and weary and discouraged at leaving him alone, and then when we got into the middle of the sea a storm came up and the ship was tossed with waves and the wind was against us and we were toiling at the oars and we thought, He is lost to us and our hour is come, and then we saw him walking toward us on the sea.

Walking on the face of the water?

Yes, and we thought it was a spirit and we cried out in terror, for we all saw him and he said, Be of good cheer, it is I. Don't be afraid. And he came into the ship with us and the wind ceased and we came easily across to the other side, where the people stoned him.

And now? What will he do now?

He will go on preaching the Kingdom of Heaven.

Where? To whom?

To any one who will listen.

And you will follow him, even though you will become outcasts yourselves?

Yes. He is our Lord.

And Mary, the mother of Jesus, looked at Simon's parents and they nodded. They were agreed that their son could not abandon Jesus.

### Part Three





## Chapter One

*From the land of Jordan and of the Hermons,  
From the hill Misar,  
Deep unto deep is calling at the noise of thy waterfalls  
All thy breakers and billows are gone over me.*

*With a sword in my bones mine enemies reproach me,  
While they say unto me all the day, Where is thy God?  
Why art thou cast down, O my soul?  
And why art thou disquieted within me?*

**A**T THE base of Mount Hermon, at the far north boundary of the land of Israel, on the borders of Tyre and Sidon, was the place. Jesus took refuge there, and it was in this wild mountainous region that he faced his last great temptation.

There had always been a sanctuary of waters at the end of the long valley that winds down through the Lebanons. For a cliff rose at the top of a deep gorge and out of a cavern in the cliff burst a river that fell roaring into a pond so deep that some said it had no bottom; and men from time immemorial had come there to worship. Baal, the Phœnician, had been its first deity. Baal of the subterranean waters; then Pan had come piping his nymphs through the mysterious jungle of fern and brush; then Herod the Great, when Augustus had given him the

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region, had made the Roman emperor its god and built a white temple on the top of the cliff as a shrine for Cæsar and set Cæsar's bust in it, close by the shrine of Pan, and Apollo too was enshrined there on the site of the ancient tribal city of Dan. But Jesus of Nazareth, when he came, was a fugitive, a Jew, persecuted by the Jews and driven by them into exile.

It was the north gate of the land Jehovah had given to his people, a gate that must be forced by any Roman, Greek, Syrian or Persian enemy, a sanguinary and terrible gate. Suppose he had gone through it, suppose he had shaken the dust of his land off his feet forever, as he was tempted to do?

Every invader who came from the north, had had to fight there in the past. It was there that Antiochus the Great had won Palestine from Pompey in a mighty battle, and Saracens and Franks were to fight during hundreds of years to come for possession of its strong fortress. And during the ninth war that was called Holy, because many thousands of men were slain in the name of this same Jesus, Louis IX of France, though he had taken all the Jordan valley, was going to be compelled to retire before the heathen, because he could not capture this citadel. Cæsarea August, sacred city with rights of sanctuary, mysterious well of waters that had inspired a royal poet of Israel, it was called Cæsarea Philippi when Jesus fled to it with his little band of disciples, because it was in the territory of the tetrarch Philip, who had rebuilt it.

He had asked them, after the uprising in Bethsaida Julia, when so many of his followers left him: Will you also go away? and Peter had answered: To whom shall we go, Lord? Indeed they could not have gone back to the life they had lived in the world before they knew him, for

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that world had cast them out along with him their master, and there was no place in it even for Judas of Kerioth, whose mind was black with bitter disappointment. So he had taken them with him, even Judas, though he knew that Judas would betray him. But he warned them all that anyone who followed him must suffer, and he said to them again what he had often said before to the people:

Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall save it; and whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he shall come in his own glory and his Father's.

So they went with him. And it was a long way from the lake country, so far that it hardly seemed a part of Israel, and the people who lived there were Syro-Phœnicians and the land was more like heathen than holy land, for it lay to the north of the great high road to Damascus. All the traffic between Rome and the Euphrates poured across beneath them. All of Galilee lay between them and their homes, with fold upon fold of hills piled above park-like terraces of oak, until climbing from the south one came to forests of cedar and smelt snow in the air. And the deep gorge down which the fountain of the Jordan rushed headlong to the lake of Galilee, divided the land from north to south, with Nazareth on the one side and Cæsarea Philippi far to the north on the other.

*From the land of Jordan and of the Hermons,  
From the hill Misar,  
Deep unto deep is calling.*

David, the shepherd king, the mighty warrior and sweet psalmist of Israel, with whom God had made an everlasting covenant, he had made the song, crying aloud to



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Jehovah through the roaring of the torrent: God my rock, why hast thou forsaken me? And now a descendant of the house of David stood under the ageless, watching mountain, listening to the same voice of the waters, and cried to the same great, invisible God in his distress.

He knew the song. He had learned it when he was a child, and he knew the promise God had made to David. Had he not been told all the story when he was a little boy and learned the words the Lord had spoken?

David, I took thee from the sheepecote to be ruler over Israel, and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. And when thy days are fulfilled and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me a house and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity I will chasten him with the rod, but my mercy shall not depart from him, and thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee, thy throne shall be established for ever.

If ever there had been a child in Israel who had believed these words with his whole heart and worshipped the God who spoke them, it had been the boy Jesus. If there were a man alive now in Jewry who had lost faith in the ultimate fulfilment of that sacred promise, he was not that man. But his faith was no longer the faith of the boy who had been filled with such profound wonder on his first visit to the great temple of Jerusalem, nor was it the radiant faith of the glorious herald who had proclaimed the glad tidings of the Kingdom of Heaven. It was the faith of a man disappointed, disillusioned, desperate. For he had been confident in the beginning that the people

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would assuredly turn to God and bring in the glorious era of the Kingdom of Heaven. But almost no one had believed him when he had told them that they could found the Kingdom if only they would do what he asked. And almost no one had acted when he called for action; even among the youth of the nation, and indeed no one had even understood what he was saying. For what he had said was hateful to the old men because it was new, and meant revolution, but though he had hoped to have the youth of the nation with him it had not been revolutionary enough for them. The young men had turned against him because he would not lead them in rebellion, the governing classes because they were afraid he would do this very thing, and the religious leaders, those plain, devout men of the synagogue who should have been his friends, accused him of the most hideous crime known in Israel, treason against God, though he had faithfully preached obedience to the will of God, and declared that God would save the people, if only they would love him with all their souls and all their strength and all their might.

Where then should he go? What should he do? To whom should he turn with his urgent knowledge of the truth? Capernaum, Bethsaida, Choraizin, would not listen. Even Capernaum, his own city where he had done such mighty works, would have none of him. The people who had once come to him with plagues and horrid sores to be healed were as loath to approach him as if he were a leper. And he was a leper to the churchmen of Israel. The memory of the sneers of his triumphant enemies, the Pharisaic doctors, was like a sword in his bones. He seemed to hear them taunting him from their smug pulpits. Where is thy God now, Jesus of Nazareth?

But Nazareth had long ago disowned him. He had no

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home now anywhere, nor any country that he could call his own, save that region beyond the visible world where he went alone to commune with God. And he had no church any more, for he was shut out of the synagogue, nor was there any shrine on earth where he could worship. When he went up to the temple in Jerusalem he went in danger of his life, for the priests were resolved to kill him, and the temple guard had orders to take him prisoner. Yet he must preach the Kingdom of Heaven.

Where? Who would listen now?

He looked back at the land that had been his own country, and he saw the people who were his own people. The free commonwealth of God. Cæsar governed it. That was no matter. But the priesthood was sold to Cæsar and they had sold the soul of the people for gold. And the temple was become a market, where a man bought God's forgiveness for a few pennies. And Herod was in league with the Romans to break down the people's faith in God. His gladiators were lodged under the temple mount, and slaves slaughtered each other in the arena not a stone's throw from the Holy of Holies, before a crowd mad with excitement. And the religious leaders could do nothing against the great roaring tide of the world that was sweeping from the west, for the law they taught had become a dead thing in their hands. And he saw that his people were doomed, as the temple was doomed, and that all their sin offerings and their burnt offerings and their peace offerings and their holy feasts could not help them. Yet he knew that he had been destined to save them. Not as they hoped. Not in the way they chose. Not as the Son of David. That never. The blood in his veins was of no account in this drama between God and the people, and he took no account of it. Long ago he had faced that temptation and put it behind him.

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He explained this to his disciples. He never told them much of his inner experience, for it could not be told, nor could they have understood, but now he told them how at the very outset, before he had begun to teach in Galilee, he had gone into the wilderness to be alone with God, and the devil had come to him there and had tempted him, after he had fasted many days, when he was made weak with hunger. And the tempter had said: If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he had answered and said what he had said to the people at Bethsaida Julia—Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil had taken him up into the holy city of Jerusalem and set him on a pinnacle of the temple and said to him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, and he had said to him what he had often said to the scribes who asked him for a sign to prove his power: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. And again the devil had taken him on to an exceeding high mountain and shown him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and said: All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. And he had said: Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve.

Power, principalities, a crown. It was this that the people had offered him at Bethsaida. But he had already rejected it in the wilderness. For he had known even then that he could have been the Messiah they expected, but that it was not the will of God. And this he explained during those days in the lonely north, to Peter and James and John, and that other very young John, who was only a boy, and whom he loved dearly. But he did not tell them that now he was tempted again with a greater temptation than any he had ever known before. He went away from

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them into the mountains to face that alone, and he dealt with it in that other awful region beyond the world. All his power had always come from there, all his awful prophetic knowledge, all the consuming passionate love for men that racked him when he came back into their world. Son of God and Son of Man. Deeper and deeper had he penetrated into both worlds while he lived among the little men who could not understand him, and the effort to reconcile them both together in himself, shook him often as a tree is shaken in a storm, and the stress and clash tore him, and there were times when he faced failure, and this was one of them, and there were times when he felt forsaken of God.

Yet he must preach the Kingdom of Heaven. And the devil whispered to him, If thou must, then why not go to the people of Tyre and Sidon? And it was a very subtle temptation, for many Phœnicians had come down into Galilee to hear him and had carried back to their homes the strange wonderful news of a god who loved men as a father loves his children. If he went to those lands that the Jews called outer darkness, he knew that he would be received as a prophet and saviour and friend, for they had nothing, not even a promise of a messiah. But if he went back to his own people he would be put to death, and if he died, who would found the Kingdom of Heaven?

He was racked by doubt. He was so troubled that when a Syro-Phœnician woman found him out in his retreat and asked him to heal her daughter who was possessed of a devil, he turned on her with savage irony, It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs.

And he asked his disciples, Whom do men say that I am? and they answered—John the Baptizer, risen from the dead. But some say Elijah, and others, one of the prophets. And he pressed them, it was almost as if he

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needed their assurance. But whom say you that I am? And Peter answered, Thou art the Messiah.

And he charged them that they should tell no man. And a few days after that he took Peter and James and John and went high up into the awful lonely mountain to pray. And while he prayed the three disciples fell asleep, and waking they saw him gloriously transfigured, with his countenance altered out of knowledge, and his raiment was white and glistening and there were two men talking with him, and they were Moses and Elijah come to tell him that he must die. But the disciples kept it close and told no one, until long afterwards, what they had seen. And though he began to tell them from that day how he must suffer many things and be killed, they couldn't understand and couldn't believe him. Indeed they didn't know until it was all finished and he had done what he had to do, how it was at Cæsarea Philippi where Pan piped to his nymphs and Cæsar stared from stone eyes out over the land of Israel, that he had made up his mind to turn back, go up to Jerusalem and be killed. Nor did they realise that he allowed them at last to call him Messiah, on condition that he was to die for the people, not rule over them.

Deep had called unto deep. His crisis was over.

Far to the south in a town that hated him a woman was praying to the God of Israel to keep him safe. She didn't know where he was. She didn't believe in his gospel. During his short period of triumph she had been persuaded that he was out of his mind. But now that all the world had turned against him she knew that she must be with him, for he was flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone.

Yet it was hard for her to get free and go to him. She

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was so hemmed in by the walls of her house. When she went up on to the roof top at night, if it was the first day of the month, she could see the beacon fires lighted on the hills to signal the new moon, but she could see nothing beyond. And though the wide world, where she was to be endlessly enthroned, lay in that beyond and time was pouring under her out of the unknown beginning into the unknown end, carrying her with it to a million shrines in the uttermost parts of the earth, she could not know anything of this, as she sat on her little bench or stood with the women of the congregation in her village synagogue repeating the articles of the faith of her forefathers:

I believe with perfect faith that the creator, blessed be His name, is the author and guide of everything that has been created.

Little Naomi was dead. She had died asking to see Jesus, who had healed her once and always been her friend. Old Anna was gone, no one knew whither. Susannah, the wife of Solomon the miller, no longer acknowledged Jesus now that he was an outcast, and though she was still secretly fond of him, her husband, who had to think of his business, had bade her make an end of her friendship with the family. So Mary stood alone among the women, with her sister and her sons' wives, but her sister was her only friend now in the town.

I believe with perfect faith that the whole Law now in our possession is the same that was given to Moses.

I believe with perfect faith that this Law will not be changed, and that there will never be any other law.

Was that true? Did she truly believe it? Yes, she believed it. She could not do otherwise. But she was ready now to break the Law if she must, in order to find her son again.

I believe with perfect faith that the creator, blessed be

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his name, rewards those that keep his commandments and punishes those that transgress them.

Chloe, the wife of the hairdresser, had been taken in adultery with a Roman soldier and stoned to death. She had been dragged screaming to the market-place and stripped of her clothes, and all the men of the town had stoned her with stones till her sinful little body was a broken heap on the ground. Her own husband had cast the first stone at her, then all the other men of the place.

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and though He tarry I will wait daily for His coming.

For thy salvation I hope, O Lord, I hope Lord for thy salvation. O Lord for thy salvation I hope.

With great fervour and childlike simplicity did she repeat the words. But she was not sure that if she went to join Jesus that she could hope for salvation or expect to join her husband in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, she was almost certain that she would be cast out with her son into the burning pit for ever. Nevertheless, she knew she must defy the Law and go in search of him, simply because he was her son and in great trouble.

And she tried to ascertain the mind of God in the matter. And she asked Him, would it be a very great sin if she went to this son who should have been a very holy man, yet had broken the Law and been execrated. But she received no certain answer, and because of everything she had always believed and her deep fear of God she felt she must have an answer. And then suddenly one day as she sat on her bench in the courtyard, it came to her what she must do, and she rose quickly and drawing her shawl round her, hurried to the door, pulled it open with trembling hands and slipped out into the street. She would go to the Master of Nazareth and hear from his own lips what she wanted to know; and when she knew, why then



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she would act knowing the full penalty that she must suffer.

Lust and ambition were, she knew, the source of all wretchedness. Pride, gluttony, wine-bibbing and improper conversation were offences of which no woman of gentle breeding could be guilty, and adultery merited death, undoubtedly, and calumny stood next to murder and incest, and idolatry in the list of very dreadful sins, and God usually punished it with leprosy. But the most fearful of all were false prophecy and blasphemy. But again, she did not know just what constituted blasphemy, and she wasn't certain that she didn't idolise Jesus. But the Master would know. He knew all the Law. It was his business to weigh and judge and punish the sin of any woman in Nazareth who rebelled against it.

Such a gentle rebel she was. When she knocked at his door she was breathless, but her thin, little worn face was set with determination, and she asked the woman who opened to her if she might see the Master, in a low but very firm voice. And the woman, who was the wife of the rabbi and the mother of many children, as the wives of good rabbis should be, ushered her immediately into a shabby room all hung with dried herbs, and the Master of Nazareth was seated there at a great table covered with rolls of parchment. There were cobwebs in the corners of the room, there was dust everywhere; a cat was washing its kittens on the doorstep that led into the garden, and a small child was wailing somewhere outside. And though she had had to summon up all her courage to come to him, Mary's fear left her when she looked into the learned rabbi's face, for it was kind, and she spoke suddenly from her heart, like a child.

I am the mother of Jesus, she said, that Jesus who has been cast out of the synagogue. I am afraid for my son

## Mary of Nazareth

and would find him. Tell me, good Master, will I forfeit eternal life when I go to him?

He looked into her face a long moment in silence and his eyes, she saw, were old and weary, and as she gazed a shadow seemed to fall down over his strong, furrowed visage, and at last he said in a strange deep voice that was like a great cracked bell, and that seemed to sound a note of regret:

It is long since I last saw your son, I have never spoken to him. He was gone down into Judea when I called at your house and then when he came here he was driven out of the synagogue, and though I went to hear him in Capernaum, I had no speech with him. Where is he now?

I do not know, Master.

How then will you find him?

I cannot tell yet, but my nephew Simon is with him.

I know. The son of Clophas is one of his disciples.

How strange his voice sounded, booming out in the little room, and how poor he must be. The room was dirty and very shabby. What a pity that the wife of such a holy man should be so slovenly. Mary waited humbly to be told the fate of her immortal soul, but instead he asked her:

If you find him will you bring him back to Nazareth?

Oh no, he would never come back now.

You mean to stay with him?

Yes, I thought I could make a house for him somewhere. He has no place to live.

Even if he will not give up teaching his strange doctrine?

Yes, even then. She caught her breath and her great eyes widened.

Because you believe in it?

No, oh no.

## Mary of Nazareth

Why then are you going to him if you don't believe in him?

Oh, oh, can you not understand? Because my very soul longs for him and I am afraid.

And again he looked at her with that strange deep weary look and he said:

If your mind is made up why have you come to me?

I do not know what my punishment will be.

He seemed, the great master, not to understand. He frowned, and yet it almost seemed to her that he smiled; and yet again his eyes had that look of dark regret that was almost like hopelessness, so she added:

My son is an outcast. He is accursed. The malediction was read out in the synagogue and James, my second son, tells me that if I go to him, I too will be cursed by God. Is that true?

He looked at her gravely now. There was no smile nor frown on his face, but only a great weariness, and he said deliberately:

I do not know. I am judge here in Nazareth. I am the guardian of the Law and I instruct the people and endeavour to administer justice, and I have to decide many questions of dispute between one and another. But I cannot decide between you and your conscience and I cannot answer for God, for I am no prophet. I am only a teacher and a student of the Law and a seeker after truth, like your son.

And her heart beat quickly and she clasped her thin hands together and cried, Then you esteem him. You think he is good. You do not believe that he has spoken blasphemy.

He has broken the Law. But he has not, as far as I know, used the ineffable name in vain, and I testified as much before the Sanhedrin.

## Mary of Nazareth

And you do not think him guilty of false prophecy?

That I cannot say. I am not certain. I do not know him well enough.

But you do not accuse him of sorcery?

No, I do not think your son is a sorcerer.

Why then has he been cast out of the synagogue, and why has he been execrated?

He was silent awhile, staring down; then he looked at her under his grizzled brows.

Your son is teaching a new law that will destroy the Law of Moses, if we do not destroy him. He is turning the world upside down and striking at the very foundations of the faith of our nation. Were the people to believe in him, they would have to undo the world and build a new one from the beginning. And as far as I understand, this is what your son wishes, and it is what he means by the Kingdom of Heaven. But we believe that if our people acted on his words, they would cease to be Jews. Do you understand?

I think so, a little.

And because we who preserve Israel are against him, he has attacked us vehemently. He can see no good in any of us. He accuses all those who uphold the old order of being hypocrites. But we are not all hypocrites nor are we all vipers. And the Master of Nazareth smiled as he said it, but his face was infinitely weary again when he went on, and his eyes that gazed past her as if at some distant vision were sombre.

He had to be cast out. Yet I think it has been a case of grave misunderstanding from the beginning. Your son might have done much for the people. But now it is too late, too late to do anything. He has broken the Law and set all the rulers against him. And the rabbi was silent, with a silence that she dared not break and indeed she

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could think of nothing more to say to him. But when she rose to go, he went with her to the door, and he said as he opened it for her to go out, Peace be with you, Mary, and with your son. And he stood watching her from his doorway.

And so she passed out of his life and her son with her. She never spoke with him again. Nor was he of the school of Pharisees who would ever have persecuted Jesus of Nazareth. He was one of the many good men who never become known in the world.

And she went back to her house, not very much wiser than before, and it was a miserable place.

Her sons Joseph and Jude and Simon were angry with her, knowing that her heart still hankered after the son who had disowned her, and they tried to wring out of her some word of condemnation, but she would not speak it. And they were all very poor and they grudged her the food she put in her mouth and the house was full of quarrelling. But James lived apart from them all. He had smeared evil-smelling bitumen on his face and prayed so much alone that his knees were become like the knees of a camel. Yet she scarcely noticed. The truth was that the house had become a shadow and the people in it moved like ghosts about her and the bitter words of her sons scarcely penetrated her ears, for she knew in her heart that she would soon be gone now, and though she had in her all the fierce tribal pride of her people it was nothing to her any more what became of the family she and her husband had founded, so great was her anxiety for the one who was a fugitive.

But there was one house in Nazareth that seemed a real house to her, the house of Clophas. When she went there she could talk of Jesus and sometimes hear news of him. For young Simon sent letters to his mother and though

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they were long in coming and the facts in them difficult to piece together, the two women would make Clophas read them aloud again and again, since they could not read the writing themselves.

And the first letter said: Jesus has decided to turn back. We are crossing over into the Decapolis. We have begged him to stay in this friendly country, but he will not. Yet we can see that he is greatly troubled.

And the next letter said: We cannot understand what it is that compels him to return, or what he intends. We know now and we believe that he is the Messiah foretold in the scriptures, the anointed one who is to deliver the people, and he himself says that he is, yet he tells us that he must suffer and be killed and we do not understand how this can be. For how can the Messiah be put to death and how can Jesus die if he is the Messiah? We know that the Messiah is to set up his throne in Jerusalem and rule over the whole world for a thousand years. And even though it be true as Jesus says, that his Kingdom cannot be established until all the people turn to God with their whole hearts, we believe they would turn, that they would even now repent, if only he would proclaim himself their deliverer. He tells us instead that though he is in very truth the Messiah, we must not make it known to anyone.

And in another letter Simon said: I understand less than ever. The people are flocking to us in great numbers in spite of the decree of the Sanhedrin, and he is preaching the Kingdom as never before, but still he will not let us say that he is the Messiah. We are moving south through all the Greek cities of the Decapolis on the other side of the lake, but we are afraid of what will come to pass if we press on into Judea. All of us are very troubled, save Judas of Kerioth. He is overjoyed.

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And again some weeks later Simon wrote, evidently in great distress: He has set his face toward Jerusalem. Often he strides ahead of us on the road, his face set like a flint, and when he talks to us we cannot understand his sayings and we are afraid to ask him. Judas is triumphant. He says that Jesus will do in Jerusalem what he would not do in Galilee. He refused to lead the people then, Judas says, because they were not ready and he knew the uprising would fail, but now, according to Judas, he intends to lay siege to the capital, overthrow the high priests and the great Sanhedrin and proclaim himself king. But I do not believe this, nor do the others.

And so the summer passed and autumn came, and the two Marys, week after week, endeavoured to follow their sons from place to place by means of the few facts Simon told them; and when a letter came saying: They turned us out of such and such a place and set the dogs on us and drove us away with stones, and the sons of Zebedee would have called on God to destroy the village, but the Master forbade them; they would look at each other with hot tears scalding their eyes and rock back and forth in their sorrow for the pity of it; but if the letter said: The people of this village have received us gladly, then they too would be glad and their fears would subside somewhat.

And the Feast of the Tabernacles, that most joyous, thanksgiving feast of all the year, was near, and a letter came saying they were back in Galilee, but this time Simon wrote in great jubilation. It is true. We are to march to Jerusalem to besiege it, armed with the Word of God, but not yet, not until the spring. The Master is sending seventy disciples ahead through all the country to prepare the way, and already the people are coming back to him in such numbers that the authorities dare not touch him. And Mary's sons came to her saying, We are going

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up to Jerusalem for the feast, and we would take you with us if you would offer a peace offering in the temple.

But Mary refused to go with them. She said to herself: They would have me make my peace with God over Jesus and renounce him before the holy altar. And she thought of all the people who would go up to the holy city singing with palm branches in their hands and of the music and the torch dancing, and she longed to share in the joyous festivity, but she could not, because she thought Jesus would not be there. So they went without her, and it was their going that brought her life in Nazareth to an end.

For they met their brother all unexpectedly on the way, and being unprepared this time to lay hold of him and lock him up, they taunted him with sneers, accusing him of being a coward and saying: What are you doing skulking here in Galilee? Go up into Judea so that the people who believe in you can see what works you do. Why do you stay here in hiding? Show yourself to the world.

And Jesus said to them: My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready. Do you go. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I declare it to be evil. Go up to this feast. I am not going yet for my time is not full come.

But when they had gone, then he, too, went up to the feast, not openly with his disciples, but as it were secretly; and in the midst of the feast, when the high priest was carrying the golden pitcher from the pool of Siloam through the water gate into the outer court of the temple with all the trumpets sounding and the musicians chanting psalms, he appeared suddenly in Solomon's porch over against the treasury and began to teach, and the people marvelled at his knowledge, and the natives of Jerusalem said:



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Is not this he whom they seek to kill? But he speaks boldly and they say nothing to him. Do the rulers believe, then, that he is the anointed one of God?

But the people of Galilee said: We know where the man comes from, but when the Deliverer comes no man will know whence he is.

And Jesus cried as he taught, and his voice rang down the colonnade: You both know me and you know whence I am. But Him that sent me, you do not know.

And they began to be angry because he told them that they did not know God, yet claimed to be sent by God. And they had been spending the night in the temple watching the torch dances and had been feasting and were full of food and wine and music and in the midst of all this he told them they were slaves and children of the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning and a liar and the father of lies.

If God were your father you would love me, for I come from God. But because I tell you the truth you believe me not.

And many other things he said to them that angered them exceedingly, and there was a tumult, and the crowd made a rush to pick up stones to cast at him, and they would have stoned him had he not hid himself and gone out of the temple.

And Mary's sons told her, when they returned home, of what had occurred. Though they had not meant to tell her of their meeting with Jesus, they blurted out all the story; and once the truth was out they pretended to their mother that they were proud of it; nor did they attempt to disguise from her how they had taunted him with being afraid to go up to the feast. And when she said, questioning them sharply:

Were you there when the people would have stoned him?

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They said: Yes, we were there.

And he was alone?

Yes.

Without any of his disciples or any friend with him?

Not a soul was with him.

And everyone against him?

Some they told her had seemed at first to believe in him. There was much murmuring in the crowd. One would say he is a good man, and another that he was deceiving the people, and there was the usual talk of his miracles. He had healed ten lepers, they said, all in one day. And others declared that he could bestow eternal life as a gift, but when he claimed in our hearing to have been born before Abraham, they were all enraged against him.

And you watched the tumult?

Yes, we watched, they answered, somewhat uncomfortably.

And saw the people rush to pick up stones to cast at him?

Yes.

And you did nothing?

No.

None of you?

No. What would you have had us do? He had blasphemed. We have no part nor parcel now in his life.

Nor in his death?

They were silent facing her, and she held them there. She would not let them go, and she said: Yet you urged him to go to the feast, knowing that he might be killed?

We did not think he would go, they muttered, shuffling their feet, and she looked from one to the other until her eyes rested on James.

And you, James, did you, too, believe your brother was a coward or did you mean to send him to his death?

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And James's face was ravaged as he answered her: I did not taunt him or speak to him. He blasphemed. I can have nothing more to do with him.

And at that she answered them all: But I have to do with him.

And she went that same night to her brother's house and said: Write to Simon and tell him that I must know where Jesus is, for I would go to him.

## Chapter Two

**S**HE started too late; he was ahead of her all the way; she never caught up with him. She would reach a place only to find he had left it and moved on. At the outset, she just missed him. He had been in Galilee quite close to her, not more than a day's journey, while she still lingered over her little arrangements.

She should have had plenty of time. It was still autumn when her sons came back from the Feast of the Tabernacles and he still had five months to go. Long enough, one would have thought, for her to get to Jerusalem ahead of him. But the winter was gone before she started, and when she did set off she didn't make straight for the capital.

Simon didn't answer for a long time. It was weeks before his letter came, and when it did it was of little help to her. Indeed, if it hadn't been for the young disciple John she might not have got to Jerusalem at all.

So many things stopped her. Clophas was taken with a fever and died, and she had to bury him and mourn him with her sister. Then Jude's wife was delivered of a child, and she was needed for that. Though her sons and her sons' wives hardly spoke to her now, she was so accustomed to women in the travail of childbirth that they were glad to make use of her. And, of course, she didn't know that Jesus was walking to his death out of the wilderness beyond Jericho and along the winding roads of Galilee and Peria. His route seemed to be a circuitous one. It

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wouldn't have looked, had one been able to trace it, like a straight way, but it was; and it ended suddenly in a place called the Place of a Skull.

Had she known that she had need to make haste if she were ever to speak to him again; if only someone could have told her, she wouldn't have let these things or anything delay her. She had a few trinkets that her husband had given her long ago when she was young. She had to sell these to get money for her journey. But she wouldn't have worried about money if she had known how little time was left. She wouldn't have waited for her sister or anyone. She would have let the dead bury the dead, would have started off alone on foot if need be, would have begged her way to him and run till there was no breath in her and her feet were bleeding. And surely all Israel would have been kind to her on the road had she told them that she was hurrying to Jerusalem to her son who was about to be crucified by the Roman governor of Judea.

But she didn't know this. She couldn't see into the future any more than Pilate or that wily old man Annas, or his son-in-law, Caiaphas, the high priest, or Herod, the degenerate Arab who aped the Romans and sat listening over his wine to the clever talk of Greek philosophers as if he had all eternity before him. Each had just so much time and no more, but each dreamed dreams that were endless while they hurried toward the sudden end. And Mary dreamed of making a home for Jesus in some mountain village. She saw the little place by a stream with meadows round it full of wild flowers and a wood singing with birds, and she saw herself busy with her housecleaning and her baking, or sitting quietly mending Jesus's ragged tunic, as she always had done. And in her mind she would go to the door and look for him as she had used to do when he was a little boy, and would see

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him coming with the light shining behind him, and sometimes she would confuse the future with the past and see him coming to her, small and light and walking proudly as little boys do.

And Pilate, though he was trembling, kept saying to himself: If I can make friends with the tetrarch and consolidate my position with the high priests, I'll be safe enough; and he saw himself crowned with laurels, marching through a triumphal arch into Rome at the head of a victorious army. Yet in three years he was to be dismissed in disgrace and the tetrarch was to be banished to Spain by a new Cæsar. For even Tiberius, the god emperor, was to die soon and great changes were to come over the land God had given the Jews. The days of the Holy City of God were numbered and the days of the people of God in the land that the Lord their God had given them. War was coming, the war that Jesus of Nazareth would have brought upon the people had he let them crown him king at Bethsaida Julia. Other prophets were going to arise after his death and attempt to do what he had refused to do, and the Jews were going to be divided against themselves and were going to slaughter each other from the foot of Mount Hermon to the southernmost edge of Judea. Cæsarea Philippi, the sacred sanctuary, was to be a scene of bloody carnage. Capernaum, Choraizin, Bethsaida were going to disappear from the face of the earth. The Romans were coming down from Antioch with a great army of foot and horse and archers; and Vespasian, the great Roman general, was to climb to the imperial throne on the bleeding body of Israel, as Titus, his son, was to do on the carcase of Jerusalem; and a Jew was to tell the story of how the Judeans were going to go mad inside the walls of Jerusalem with Titus and his legions encamped against the gates of the city. For a sedition, begotten of another

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sedition, was to tear the people in pieces and Israel was to behave like a wild beast gone mad, which for want of food from without, fell at last to eating its own flesh, and a fearful Feast of the Passover was coming, when the holy altar of the temple was going to be a lake of blood. The priests were going to be slain as they were offering up their sacrifices of lambs and goats to Jehovah and many persons, who came from the ends of the earth to the holy place to worship, were to fall down themselves before their sacrifices, mingling their own blood with the blood of the animals, and the dead bodies of the pilgrims were to be mixed on that holy day with the corpses of the priests and all sorts of dead carcasses. And in the end the city and temple were going to be razed to the ground, except for the three towers built by Herod the Great at the corners of his palace. Titus was going to leave these as a memorial, but where the city stood there was going to be nothing but a horrid flat strewn with broken stones and a small camp of Roman soldiers.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not.

Israel, that peculiar people, had always mingled the past and future in her sacred writings, and seen in the past, through the eyes of her prophets, visions of what was to come. She had not lived in the present. She had lived in the future, clinging in her tribulations to God's promise to David, lived in hope, with her mind fixed on the promised day of deliverance, and it was this that had kept her alive. But now there was no one in all the land who could foresee what was going to happen except Jesus of Nazareth, who had only a few weeks left in which to save the people and found his Kingdom of Heaven.

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To go into every city and village throughout the whole land and tell every soul who would listen, and instruct his disciples carefully so that they would carry on his work when he was gone and prepare them for his death, so that they would not lose faith in him when he died, all this he had to do in the little time that was left. And he must heal the sick as he went, for he could not cease to pity them because he himself needed pity; and he must go on comforting those who wanted comforting and play sometimes with children and enjoy himself a little, for he was naturally a happy man and he loved the world God had made and the land God had given his fathers, and it must have seemed to him more beautiful than ever now that he knew he wouldn't be in it much longer; and he loved his disciples. Oh, dearly did he love Peter and James and John and young John and Simon and the others. He trembled for them knowing their weakness and set himself to encourage them and make them strong for what he knew they would have to endure if they were faithful to his memory.

Be not afraid of those that kill the body. Fear him who has power to cast into hell. They will deliver you up to the law courts and they will scourge you in their synagogues. The world will hate you and you will be persecuted and reviled for my sake. If they call me Beelzebub, how much more will they call you who are members of my family? But remember, he that despises you despises me, and he that despises me despises Him that sent me. He that receives you, receives me, and whosoever shall give you a cup of cold water to drink in my name truly, I say unto you, he will not go unrewarded.

And he promised them when he talked of his death that he would come again: Let your loins be girded up and your lights burning and you yourselves like men who wait for



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their Lord when he will return for the wedding, so that when he comes you will be ready to open to him immediately.

And they, like every one else, seemed unable to believe what they did not want to believe, so they didn't believe that he would be killed, but believed him when he said he would come in clouds of glory. And they began to dispute among themselves on the road as to who should have first place in his kingdom while he strode ahead with his eyes fixed on the dreadful city. For he had gone into the wilderness beyond Jericho after the Feast of the Tabernacles and then into Galilee, and was bound for Judea again before Mary left Nazareth, and she all the while was telling herself that she was foolish to be so frightened, that he would never go up to Jerusalem again after being stoned. That, she told herself, was finished. That dream of his had come to nothing and that danger was past. He had escaped by a miracle, and he would be content now to go on with his teaching in the outlying villages far from the capital.

But where? Simon had at last answered, and he said that they were going again, he thought, to the country on the other side, to Philadelphia, perhaps. He wasn't certain. They never knew from one day to another where they would be. Jesus himself had said to one who would have joined him: Foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay his head.

That was another thing that delayed her. Her heart sank when she heard Simon's letter read aloud. Philadelphia? Why, it was away on the other side of Jordan on the edge of the Arabian desert, and who knew if he would stay there? And how could she hope to find her son if she didn't know where to look for him? But then she had a letter from that young disciple who had come with

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Simon to Nazareth, and the letter said: Most honoured and blessed mother of my Lord, I am acquainted by Simon with your desire, and I write to tell you that the Master is determined to go into Judea again, and I believe he means to go up to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. If you would see him, join yourself to Salome, the wife of Zebedee or to Mary Magdalene, who has stayed behind in Capernaum to look after the sick who were left there.

And she ran to her sister in great fear and begged her for the sake of their dead husbands and living sons to go with her. And her sister, when she heard the letter, consented immediately and cried to God to prevent this thing, for she, too, loved Jesus as her own son.

And so at last they started; and Mary's three sons, Joseph and Jude and Simon, would not bid her farewell. But James walked a mile with the two women along the road, hoping perhaps at the last minute to dissuade them from their purpose, and when he saw that they would not turn back he cautioned the merchant, whose caravan they had joined, to watch over them, for they seemed to him very helpless and frail to be starting off on such a journey. And he said: God be with you both, and stood looking after them with a strange, troubled foreboding, and it was near the place where the people of Nazareth had tried to throw his brother headlong over the cliff. He was to be killed for that brother's sake not many years later, and his mother, who was disappearing down the road on the back of a camel, was to meet with him again in Jerusalem, but her other sons had already dropped into oblivion before the caravan with its two hooded women was lost to view.

It was good to be off at last. It was such a relief that they could not help feeling more cheerful. Had they not left all their dreary cares and sorrows behind them? Were they not going to see the sons whom they loved? Good

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Clophas was at rest in his grave, but Jesus and Simon were alive, and God was surely watching over them. Their eyes were bright as they looked at each other, they smiled with surprise at themselves. Truly this was a great adventure for two poor widow women. How much you could see from the high back of a camel! They had a sense of freedom such as they hadn't known since they were girls, and they talked to each other of the past, recalling all the sweet memories they had in common, and they even found themselves laughing, for the high spirits of the camel-drivers were contagious and very exhilarating.

Do you remember, sister, when Jesus fell head first into the fountain in Susannah's courtyard, while he was sailing his little boat, and old Anna pulled him out all dripping wet and laughing?

And how he and Simon used to play at soldiers, and how Joseph made them small bows and arrows like those of a Roman archer?

But Jesus would never shoot at the birds.

Oh no, he always had a tender heart for all God's creatures.

Old Anna was dead. But no one was ever to know what had become of the old woman who had waited all her life for the coming of the Messiah. She, too, had missed Jesus. She had taken the road to the north to find him, when he had already crossed over Jordan into the Decapolis, and she lay there at the base of Mount Hermon under a tree where she had fallen, with her strong staff beside her and her cold face turned up to heaven; and the two Marys went on happily with the caravan to Capernaum.

But when they reached Capernaum and went to the house of Zebedee and asked for Salome his wife, they were told that Jesus had come and gone only a little while before. Nevertheless, they were made welcome for his sake,

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and were given a large, clean room in the comfortable house and rich food to eat that they could not swallow for weariness and disappointment. Indeed, they began to feel anxious that very first evening, for Salome was an overbearing woman full of the importance of her own sons, who were, she declared, the Lord's favourite disciples. She could talk of nothing but Jesus's coming triumph and of how James and John would sit on either side of him on his throne when he came to reign over all the world. And when Mary asked anxiously what she meant by the saying, she answered: But don't you know? Don't you understand? He is going to make a triumphal entry into Jerusalem and be crowned there King of the Jews. And Mary began to tremble in all her limbs when she heard this, and she said that night to her sister: We must not stay here. We must press on into Judea. If what Salome says is true, we must make haste. And her sister agreed with her about pressing on, but said she must not heed the woman's talk. She was all puffed up with importance, but she could know nothing of Jesus's intentions.

Nevertheless, they told Zebedee and Salome that they must depart on their journey, since they were looking for Jesus and he was gone, and they asked, should they go straight to Jerusalem, and if so, where should they look for him in the city? But Salome cried out at that, laughing at them and saying they'd never find him in that fashion. He had many places to visit before he went to the capital. They had much better wait where they were. Her sons were certain to send her word when the great day was decided. Then they could all go up to Jerusalem together to share in the triumph. And Zebedee pressed them to stay as he was bound to do by the laws of hospitality, but when he saw that they would not and perceived the trouble they were in, being a good man and less exalted over his sons

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than his wife, he advised them to seek out Mary Magdalene, who, if anyone, could tell them where to find the Master. And by that time Mary of Nazareth was so beside herself with anxiety because of Salome's constant, excited talk of triumphal processions and judgment-seats and golden crowns that she rid herself all in a moment of her horror of Mary Magdalene and was for going immediately to the house of the sick behind the salt fish factory. But Zebedee said Mary of Magdala was no longer there. The house of the sick was closed. The authorities had closed it and driven the Magdalene out of the town because she had used it as a place of meeting for those who still believed in Jesus. There had not, in any case, been enough money to keep it open. She had often found herself without bread to give the helpless sick, and though he himself and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, had continued to send gifts, she had often had to beg in the streets for money. She had gone now to Tiberias. Chuza had given her a shepherd's hut to live in near the lepers' camp on the outskirts of the town. If they asked at the house of the Lady Joanna, that was hard by Herod's palace, she would surely direct them.

So he gave them a cart with a man to drive them, and Salome gave them a basket packed with fine white loaves and salted fish and ripe figs and pomegranates, and they drove along the road by the shining lake, through the gay, busy towns that ran one into another, till they came to Tiberias. But they had secretly decided not to go to the great, grand house of the Lady Joanna, for they were poor country women, poorly clad and not fit to appear in a palace. So they dismissed the driver on the quay under the great black walls of Herod's castle and sent him back, saying they would find their way on foot, and Mary gave him a penny for his trouble, and so he left them there in

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the crowded street with their basket of provisions on the ground at their feet.

They were half minded to leave it, for it was very heavy, but they said: No, Mary Magdalene may be glad of the good food, so they lifted it between them, and the lepers' camp was on the top of the hill behind the citadel a long way outside the town. And they had to stop often on the way up the steep winding road to rest, for the sun was hot, and it beat down on their heads and there was a great dust on the roads from all the feet of beasts. And the ass-drivers shouted at them to get out of the way, and once Mary was bumped into by a donkey laden with jars of olive oil and fell on her knees, dragging her sister down with her and all the lovely ripe figs were spilled out of the basket into the dusty road and got trampled on, while the people passed by laughing at their misfortune.

But they found Mary Magdalene at last in a little cabin in a bare place on the edge of the cliff near the lepers' camp, and she was nursing the lepers. There was no trace in her any more of the wild, dancing girl who had come long ago to see Jesus, nor, indeed, scarce any resemblance to the beautiful angel who had greeted Mary in the house of the sick. This woman's bones stood out like shelves between the hollows of her eyes and cheeks, her hands were like the hands of a labourer, and her beauty was no longer the kind of beauty that would inspire desire in any man. But Mary, the mother of Jesus, looking into her thin face, was ashamed of all the evil thoughts she had harboured concerning her, and when the Magdalene smiled a shining welcome out of her tired eyes, she fell on her neck weeping, and her sister did the same.

But Mary of Magdala could not set their minds at rest about Jesus. She had only seen him for a brief moment when he came through Galilee. He had not stopped in

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Tiberias because of Herod, but had passed through the town at the dead of night. She didn't know where he had gone or what he meant to do. He had told her to wait, and she was waiting.

For a message?

Yes, for some word, but perhaps, she added, he will not have time to let me know or want me to be there.

Where? What are you saying? Oh, what do you mean?

But she could not tell them. She didn't know what she feared. She only knew that he was terribly changed. His face was ravaged, she said, and I saw agony in his eyes, but while he was speaking to us he became again so gloriously beautiful that it was as if he had died and come back from Heaven to earth. We must wait, she said. We can do nothing but wait for some word that will guide us.

And word came from the Lady Joanna. Chuza had overheard two of Herod's men talking at the court. Jesus was staying in Jericho in the house of a tax collector called Zaccheus, and Herod's officials were saying that Jericho would be a good place to take him, for the people of that luxurious town were spineless creatures who always ran away at the smell of danger. Indeed, the Sanhedrin had sent asking Herod to take him in charge to save them trouble, for it was rumoured that he meant to go up to Jerusalem for the Passover and they feared a riot. She, Joanna, sent this message to Mary to warn her that Jesus was in grave danger, either from Herod or the Sanhedrin or both. She did not believe that Herod would take Jesus prisoner. He was haunted still by his murder of John the Baptizer, and he had asked Chuza if he believed Jesus was John come back from the dead. Indeed, Chuza thought that Herod was anxious to see Jesus to reassure himself; but the tetrarch was a subtle man. One couldn't tell what

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he would do. She was sending another trusted servant to Jericho to warn Jesus; yet she feared that if his mind were made up, he would not be warned. Perhaps Mary could reach him and prevail upon him to withdraw again for a little while.

Then, indeed, did they know that they must make haste, and they began to do up their bundles with feverish hands. But first Mary of Magdala ran all the way down the mountain to Chuza's house and begged him to lend her some conveyance for the mother of her Lord and his mother's sister, who were older than she and not so strong; and the two women of Nazareth had to wait all the morning for her to come back. She came at last accompanied by a fine litter carried by slaves, and the two older women mounted into it and went swinging down the hill with Mary of Magdala striding behind them. And they got as far as Tarichæ, at the foot of the Lake of Galilee, that same night. But many days had already passed since the two Marys had left Nazareth, and the Passover was drawing near and Jericho was very far. And the litter went back and they started again on foot next morning.

But what need to describe their journey down the long road over the hills above the awful deep of the Jordan valley to the languid, luxurious city of palm groves that Mark Antony had once given to Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt? It was a five-days' journey for a strong man accustomed to travelling on foot, and they were not strong men. Sometimes other travellers took pity on them, and they would ride a little way on some farmer's cart, but mostly they had to help each other. Up hill and down they toiled under the blazing sun, Mary of Magdala carrying the bundle of provisions on her back, and when they came to the ford over the river, they had to wait a long time before anyone would take them over, and it was near the



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place where Jesus had been baptized of John, but they did not know it. Indeed, Mary of Magdala did not know the road at all, for she had been a harlot and had never gone up to Jerusalem to any feast since the day she was born.

She did not look like a harlot when at last they entered the gate of the soft exotic city, whose walls had fallen down at the sound of a trumpet. She looked what she was, a weary peasant pilgrim from the north all covered with dust from bare head to bare feet. But why describe the three women of Galilee, all so dusty and weary and anxious, dragging their way down the wide, shaded streets that were full of tinkling music and lazy laughter, past palaces and theatres and heavily scented gardens? An oasis in the desert, it was no oasis for them, for when at last they knocked at the door of Zaccheus, the tax-gatherer, the little man told them that Jesus had been and gone.

Gone?

Yes, to Jerusalem.

But the feast is not yet?

No, the feast was not yet, but he had gone ahead with his disciples and a company of followers. Would they not come in and rest if only for one night? The road from Jericho to Jerusalem was hard, and though many pilgrims were already going up to the feast, it would not be safe for them to travel by night across the desert.

So they spent the night in the house of little Zaccheus, the publican, and he and his wife were very kind to them, and he told them how he had climbed up into a tree to see Jesus pass and how Jesus had called to him: Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house, and the three Marys would have smiled, had they been less anxious, at the funny little fellow's pride as he told the story. Indeed, it was some comfort to them to hear that Jesus had been in such good spirits. But when

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they asked Zaccheus where Jesus was to lodge in Jerusalem, he could not tell them, for he did not know.

And so the next day they started on the last stage of their long journey without any knowledge of where to go when they reached the capital, and it was a hot and weary way across a waterless waste between blistered rocks and up piled hills without any shade or any green thing. And as they climbed, the great, haggard desert opened out behind them and the waters of the bitter sea gleamed like diamonds, and across the shuddering land rose the bare edge of the mountains of the other side, and the road was thronged with pilgrims. For all Israel was coming up to the Feast of the Passover, not only from every city and village in the land, but from Damascus and Babylon and from Alexandria in Egypt and from every place under the sun where there was a colony of Jews, and they were landing in Joppa from ships even as the pilgrims who visit the shrine at Bethlehem do to-day. But on that day there were thousands upon thousands and hundreds of thousands. Indeed, some said that a million souls were gathered in the holy city for that feast and a hundred thousand head of sheep and cattle were driven up to its gates to be sacrificed. And the three Marys were in the throng, and the sun blazed down on their heads and there was no water anywhere to give even a beast to drink until they reached the Mount of Olives and saw the great battlemented walls of Jerusalem rise up suddenly before them with the white temple shining like snow and the sun glittering on its many golden spires.

Jesus had already entered the city riding on an ass, and a concourse of people had hailed him, shouting: Hosannah to the son of David! but there was no sign of him now anywhere, and the pilgrims were still pouring through the great gates in the city walls.

## Chapter Three

**J**ERUSALEM was filled with people on that Passover eve as a deep whirlpool between high rocks is filled with seething water. For days the pilgrims had been pouring through its many gates, until now the human stream had flowed into every nook and cranny in the crowded precipitous town, and the great towers on its steep hills stood up as rocks stand above a turbulent flood. Every house and stable and yard was full of people, and every room in every house was become like the room of a hostelry, and shelters had been put up outside the walls in every open space so that those who had come for the seven-days' feast could find lodging. And all the bazaars were filled with a great chattering of many tongues, and from below one could see a swarm of small black figures like a thick swarm of ants or beetles moving up and down the great white steps of the temple.

Jerusalem. City of God! Never had it been so beautiful or so prosperous. Built on a cluster of rocks in the centre of the bare highlands of Judea, its great walls girt by impassable ravines and steep precipices and a deep ravine dividing it within the walls, so that the crowded houses climbed on top of each other, tier upon tier up either side of the narrow vale that was called the Vale of Cheese-makers, to the temple mount on the one side and Herod's palace on the other, it owed its existence in very truth to Javeh, the most high god. For it was nothing but a for-

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trass, and it stood apart from the traffic of the world. It had no harbour and no river, no great highways led to it up the narrow, twisting gorges from the fertile lowlands, and it had no water supply save from a few wells and a spring down at the end of the ravine called the Pool of Siloam. And it would have become long since a dead city had it not been the shrine and throne and judgment-seat on earth of the God of Israel.

Strange, impossible, arrogant city; proud and passionate monument of a singular faith; incomprehensible enigma alike to Romans and barbarians; it had been a thorn in the side of many conquerors, and again and again in their exasperated hatred they had destroyed it. But it seemed that it could not die, for always it rose again, lifted up on the faith of its people. Nebuchadnezzar had laid it waste and taken all its strong men to Babylon, Ptolemy had brought it low, Antiochus Epiphanis had broken down its walls, plundered the temple, massacred the inhabitants. Yet now it was a new city, more beautiful than at any time in all its turbulent history, for Herod the Great had rebuilt it and Rome watched over it.

Forty years before this had Herod begun the rebuilding of the temple. It was not yet finished. It would be done just in time for its final destruction. And he had put a new great wall round the whole city crowned with battlements and many towers, and because of the deep ravines outside the walls the place was almost impregnable. The bulk of the city inside the walls faced the temple across the Vale of the Cheese-makers like a theatre, and here on the western hill Herod had built his palace, connecting it with the temple and the great fortress of Antonia by a bridge that spanned the air above the street. And the magnificent Idumean, who was the friend of Mark Antony and afterwards of Augustus, had built three

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mighty towers at the corners of his palace with turrets and battlements and strong breastworks and bulwarks. But inside the palace were gardens and groves of trees with shady walks through them and deep canals of precious clear water and bronze statues, through which water ran out into basins, and there were many dovecotes of tame pigeons by the canals, and everything was green there. And the palace contained great dining-rooms that could seat each one a hundred guests, and the variety of the carving was prodigious, and all the vessels were of silver and gold. And there were marble colonnades one after another, connecting the many royal apartments, with curiously carved pillars. And this palace had not been destroyed by the Romans after Herod's death, nor the temple touched, nor anything that was precious to the Jews interfered with until Pilate became governor. And Herod the tetrarch of Galilee lived in the palace when he came to Jerusalem by courtesy of Rome, though he had no status in Judea.

He had come down now with his court for the feast and was in residence, for he deemed it politic to appear as a worshipper in the temple when so many thousands of his Galilean subjects were gathered in the city of God. And the Roman governor had come down with his troops from his capital on the coast, as was his custom whenever a religious festival drew great crowds into the city. He had doubled the guard in the fortress of Antonia; his officers could look down from its battlements into the court of the temple, and if there were a tumult could descend by two stairways straight into the holy building; and acting in concert with Caiaphas, the high priest, for the safety of the public, he had disposed his troops through the city as if for a battle.

They were friends, these two, by force of circumstance.

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They did not love each other, for one was a subtle Jew and the other a Roman soldier incapable of subtlety. But they needed each other, and since their purpose just now was the same, namely, to keep the excitable people quiet, they understood one another well enough. Yet there was uneasiness between them, for each had his own dignity and peculiar power. The power of Caiaphas was vested in the mighty traditions of Israel. It had been given to his predecessors by the great God of the Jews and his office was that of the holy head of the nation. Nevertheless, he had been put into office by Cæsar, and it was Pilate, Cæsar's representative, who, in reality, held the reins of authority, and it was he who dispensed justice from his Tribunal, the Prætorium, in the fort of Antonia and tried the criminals whose cases Caiaphas prepared for him. The High Priest and the great Sanhedrin had been deprived by Cæsar of the right to execute any capital sentence even on members of their own race. They had no power over the lives of the Jews, only over their souls. They could condemn a man to outer darkness, but not to death; that was Pilate's prerogative. It was the Roman's business to take cognisance of all matters that had to do with the public safety or the majesty of the Empire. It was his duty to step in at any time when a charge of treason was made or a seditious movement begun or any offence was committed that could tend to decrease the power of the Roman government or lessen the respect in which it was held. And he was not the kind of man to be backward in asserting his authority. The excellent, majestic and very necessary aqueduct that spanned the air for seven miles beyond the city walls was a proof of his arrogant, thick-skinned efficiency. Within definite limitations he was an efficient servant of Rome. A soldier and the son of a soldier, he was capable of dealing with facts, however

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stubborn, but he was no diplomat, and he was exasperated by the nebulous problems arising out of religious passion. The Jews maddened him. Of what use was reason or diplomacy in dealing with a race of fanatics who rose in furious rebellion because he had used some of their temple funds to provide them with water?

If he hadn't employed the money in their interest he knew very well where it would have gone. Caiaphas was a thief and old Annas, his cunning father-in-law, was an arch-thief. And the Jews, who continually howled to Rome to be relieved of their taxes, kept on pouring money into the temple treasury without murmur or question. Tithes! The Roman was appalled at the sum involved. A tenth of all the riches of the land! Out of every flock of sheep and every herd of cattle and every field of grain or barley and every jar of olive oil, and from the date palms and the balsam groves of Jericho, and the apple orchards of Galilee and the forests on the hills, a tenth came up to Jerusalem; and twenty thousand holy priests lived in idleness on the vast revenue. And in addition to the tithes there was the traffic of the people's offerings as sacrifices to their god. How many sheep and goats and bullocks were bought and sold in the temple in the course of the year, to say nothing of turtle-doves and pigeons? He could look down from his window into the holy cattle-market and see the busy money-changers, changing the money pieces of the dusty pilgrims.

He despised the priests with whom he had to deal, but he had need of them, for they understood the strange, violent, volatile people and he didn't. They could gauge its temper, he couldn't. He even had need of the tetrarch, who was lodged over there across the bridge. Herod could give him a good name in Rome. He suspected that young rascal, the frivolous and corrupt intriguer Agrippa, of

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already maligning him in that quarter. He was right: Agrippa was gathering data with which to accuse him. A letter was to come to light which he addressed as a result to Cæsar. It said: He, Pilate, feared lest they might in reality go on an embassy to the emperor and might impeach him with respect to his corruption and his acts of insolence and his rapine and his habit of insulting people and his cruelty and his continued murder of persons untried and uncondemned and his never-ending and gratuitous and most grievous inhumanity.

The charges were not all true, but they were true enough to undo him. Certainly if by corruption was meant dishonesty in matters of money, the Roman was white as driven snow compared with those sacred bankers, Annas and Caiaphas. And Pilate knew this, and so did Herod and many of the rich Jews of Jerusalem, and even the common people of Judea, men like Judas of Kerioth, knew the truth and hated the priests who were traitors to God and the people; and there was great discontent in Jerusalem and the priests were afraid. For they knew they were guilty because they had sold their people to the Roman emperor and sold God's forgiveness to the people and pocketed his money. But their corruption was not Pilate's business. His business was to keep order in the seething city, watch against any tumult, stamp out any whisper of sedition, and crucify according to the law of Rome any murderer, robber or rebel.

There were several awaiting trial in the dungeons under him. One was Barabbas, a peculiarly dangerous brute who had headed an insurrection; and now old Annas was complaining of a man called Jesus, an itinerant preacher from the country. He had appeared, it seemed, some few days ago in the temple and driven out the money-changers



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with a whip like a herd of cattle. Pilate was inclined to like him for that. It showed the fellow had courage. No wonder old Annas was annoyed. His pocket was in danger. Pilate suspected his priestly allies when they talked of the country preacher as a rebel. His officers reported no disturbance. According to them the man was very eloquent and had great influence over the people, but talked of nothing more dangerous to Cæsar than eternal life after death and the Jews' own iniquities.

Pilate wasn't interested in the sins of the Jews. The complaints against the man Jesus exasperated him. He was a military governor responsible to Cæsar for the orderly conduct of a nation of madmen, and he had as his principal supporters a group of degenerate priests, soft as women, wily as serpents, who fawned on him, and as a possible ally a half-civilised barbarian, whom he had offended and who was surrounded by soothsayers, sorcerers, Greek sycophants and savage women.

As he stood alone that evening high above the city on the battlemented terrace of his tower, the murmur of the alien city came up to him and the voice of the temple guard going the rounds through the silent corridors of the great holy building sounded calling All is well. For the evening sacrifice was finished, the high priest had dismissed the people with the benediction of Israel and the temple was closed to the public for the night.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

A hundred thousand, nay, more than two hundred thousand people, had bowed down in silence before Caiaphas while he blessed them, then gone down into the city to prepare for to-morrow's feast; and the great building was filled now with shadow and silence and only the

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spirit of the past moved among the ghostly columns of its long corridors.

But the mighty Sanhedrin was holding a secret session in the palace of Caiaphas. It was waiting for a man who had promised to betray his master, this same Jesus, of whom they were so afraid. All the chief priests among the Sadducees, who made up Caiaphas's party in the senate, and many of the venerable learned doctors among the Pharisees had come there hoping to take the Galilean heretic prisoner and try him that very night and deliver him to Pilate for judgment in the morning before the holy feast should have begun; for it was unlawful to condemn any man or execute any criminal on a holy day.

But the Roman governor was not concerning himself with the deliberations of these venerable Jews. He did not look down at the steep, teeming streets of the city where a thousand little lights were being lighted. He looked west to the setting sun, where he could see on the horizon the far glimmer of the Mediterranean. That way lay Rome and for him, as he thought, fame or disgrace. He paced the high terrace frowning. He was uneasy, apprehensive, bored: he hated and despised the Jews.

The venerable members of the supreme ecclesiastical court of Israel were waiting for a man named Judas, who had promised to come that night and tell them where they could lay hold of his master quietly, without the people knowing. He had approached the chief priests some days before, saying: What will you give me if I deliver him up to you? and they had agreed to pay him thirty pieces of silver or about two pounds, ten shillings in the money of to-day, for his master's life. And Judas had been a God-send to the mighty law-givers of Israel, for though they had decided long since that Jesus must die, they dared not arrest him publicly for fear of an uproar among the

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people. Yet if they waited till after the feast, they were afraid he would escape them. And it was difficult to take him by craft. The fellow was, they said, too cunning. He appeared every morning very early in the temple and all the people flocked to hear him, but while he taught there he was always surrounded by a throng who hung on his lips, and at night he went out of the city, no one knew where. Now, however, all was well, for the man Judas had promised to lead them to him under cover of darkness.

But even now they were not all agreed as to what was best to be done. For when they had arrested him and taken him to Pilate, what then? Wouldn't his followers rise to a man? Old Annas, who sat there behind his son-in-law, smiled his subtle smile and shook his old head as if he had foreseen such a contingency. But there were some who said it were safer to leave Jesus alone. Had they not endeavoured during the past week to trap him into some statement that they could frame into an accusation, had they not sent their spies, who pretended to be fair-minded men, every day to listen while he taught in the temple to catch him out, yet they had not succeeded. For when they had thought to make him commit himself in regard to Cæsar and had asked him, saying:

Master, we know that you teach rightly, without respect for any authority but the true Word of God. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Cæsar or no?

He had perceived their craftiness and said: Show me a penny. Whose image and superscription is on it?

They answered: Cæsar's.

And he said: Then render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and unto God the things that are God's. And they had been reduced to silence by his answer.

And, indeed, some of the schoolmen themselves had

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been impressed by him during those days and were no longer certain that he was a false prophet and a blasphemer. But Caiaphas, who was sick with fear of the multitude, insisted that if they let Jesus of Nazareth alone, all the nation would come to believe in him, and he said:

If he raises the masses against us, Rome will take away from us even those powers that we still possess.

And when the Pharisees, who opposed him, said that the Galilean rabbi could do little harm in such a great throng, he became very angry and told them that they knew nothing at all about the state of the country; and his party, the priestly Sadducees who preferred the rule of Cæsar to that of any messiah, false or true, all upheld him, crying out from their seats, saying:

What of his triumphal entry into the city? Did you not hear how the people met him with palm branches and spread their cloaks before him on the ground as if he were a royal prince and hailed him as the son of David, the King of the Jews?

And others spoke of his magic and of how tales of his miracles were spread through the city. It was even rumoured that he had raised a man from the dead who had been four days in the grave and whose flesh had begun to stink.

And had they not tried by every means in their power to suppress him and undermine his influence? Had they not pronounced the malediction over him and declared that any man who believed him to be the Messiah would be cast out of the synagogue? Yet here he was, driving the money-changers out of the temple and teaching every day in the court of the women, and here were thousands of men defying the curse of the council for love of him.

But the more sober men among the Pharisees said there had been no such great fuss when he entered the city.

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There had only been a band of his own Galilean followers shouting and singing as the pilgrims were wont to do. If it were meant as a triumph it had on the showing of his own man Judas come to nothing. Indeed, the traitor in his camp had seemed to be possessed by a black rage of disappointment because his master had failed. He had said that Jesus had had the power in his hands once before in Galilee and could have roused the people then, but would not. As for the tale of the dead man who had been raised from the grave, the ignorant rabble doted on such tales of wonder; but one had only to watch the congregation at the morning and evening sacrifice to know that the mass of the people were unaware even of the Galilean's existence.

But those who talked this way were few, even among the Pharisees who met that night in the house of the high priest. Most of the learned men were bitterly hostile to Jesus because he had attacked them unceasingly and made a mock of their learning; and so when Caiaphas reminded them of what a small light it took to start a great conflagration among the Jews and at last put them the question: Would you rather that one man should die or that the whole nation should perish? they agreed that it were better to take him. And Caiaphas declared for the sake of the Pharisaic senators that when they had taken him they would hold an enquiry into his doctrine and let him defend himself against the charge of blasphemy before they sent him to Pilate on the different charge of sedition. And so it was decided that if he were proved guilty in their ecclesiastical court of treason against God, then they would accuse him to Pilate of treason against the emperor.

Yet what true charge of treason could they bring? If only he had committed himself over the tribute money. But he hadn't. Yet they might find witnesses, murmured

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old Annas, to swear that he had; and a false accusation before Pilate would be no sin against God, if he were convicted in their own holy council of blasphemy. In any case, they could always say that he had called himself The King of the Jews. That would be enough for Pilate.

And Jesus was taking supper with his disciples for the last time down in the heart of the city in a room that had been prepared for him by his friends. His mother wasn't with him, nor her sister, nor Mary Magdalene, for they hadn't found him. No one was there but the twelve men whom he loved, and he was saying good-bye to them.

But first this dangerous seducer, this pretender King of the Jews, had taken a basin and had washed the feet of his disciples as some plain, very holy and humble rabbi might possibly have done, and then he had sat down with them to the simple meal that they were always to remember afterwards as their own passover. But they did not know then that it was their last evening with him on earth, though they saw that he was labouring under some deep trouble; and they did not know what he meant when, toward the end of the meal, he looked at Judas and said: Go and do quickly what you have to do. They thought that he was sending Judas to buy the lamb and make preparation for the feast on the morrow. For though he had told them many times that he must die, they still could not believe it and still talked of the glorious time that was coming, and still wrangled childishly among themselves as to who should have the seats of honour in his kingdom. But when Judas was gone he began to talk to the others with such desperate yearning in his voice that a hush fell on them and a feeling of dread came over them, and he said:

With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer, for I say unto you, I will not eat any more

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passover until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. And they knew that he was thinking of the covenant God had made with the people of Israel when he had led them out of Egypt.

And he took the bread and brake it saying, in the strong imagery of his people, Take eat, this is my body broken for you, and he took the cup and passed it to them saying, This cup is the new covenant of my blood that is shed for you, and he thanked them for having been faithful to him, and he said, You are my friends. From now on I shall not call you servants, but friends. You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you, and this is my commandment, Love one another as I have loved you.

Now I go my way and none of you asks me, Where are you going? But because I have said these things, sorrow has filled your hearts. These things I have spoken unto you that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

And he said many other things to them that they remembered afterwards and faithfully wrote down, and though he was very troubled he spoke comfortingly to them, saying, Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. I go away, but I will come again. If you loved me you would rejoice because I said, I go unto the Father. And when he had talked to them a long time he rose and said, I am acting as the Father commanded. Come, let us go.

And night had fallen on the holy city of God, and in every house there were great preparations going on for the morrow's festival; and Herod's palace was ablaze with light, for he was giving a banquet to all the nobles and

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great men of the country, and Herodias sat beside him, as she had sat at another feast when her daughter had danced. But Pilate dined alone with his officers in the great keep that overlooked the House of God; and far down in a very poor quarter of the town near the gymnasium, the three Marys who had come from Galilee sat together in a corner of a room that was all filled with poor country folk like themselves, and the rough voices of the gladiators sounded in the street outside and the loud laughter of lewd women.

They had reached the city just before sundown and had gone straightway to the temple, only to find it closed for the night, and no one in the crowd of loiterers round the great steps of God's house could tell them where to look for Jesus of Nazareth. And they said to each other:

What shall we do? Where shall we go?

And Mary, the mother of Simon said: Let us go to the quarter of the Galileans. For all the pilgrims who came up to the feast came in bands shepherded by their rabbis and had quarter assigned to them by the authorities.

But Mary, the mother of Jesus said: No, they must not go near the place. It would be useless. Jesus would never go there, for the rabbis of Galilee were his enemies, and she was afraid to go where she would find people of her own country, for who knew, perhaps she would come on James and Joseph and Simon and Jude?

Yet they must do something and they must find him somehow, but they didn't know which way to turn in the labyrinth of streets or whom to ask. And they had no friends in all the great city and they knew no one to whom they could go for help. Indeed, Mary Magdalene did not know even the names of the streets or the great towers that loomed above the walls. But she was strong and young, so the other two Marys clung to her and let her lead them.



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And they asked all down the Vale of Cheese-makers at every shop, and no one knew where the rabbi Jesus lodged, and scarcely any of the shopkeepers even knew his name, and many were very curt to the women of the north country, who spoke with such a strong provincial accent, for the Judeans despised the people of Galilee and said, how could they know where a Galilean preacher was like to lodge? And night had found them still tramping the streets with nowhere to sleep.

And the three Marys were almost the only souls in all these thousands for whom no provision was made. They were lost, they were like outcasts in the great city, and at last Mary Magdalene, though she did not know her way about, had made the other two Marys wait for her by the stall of a pastrycook, who was selling hot honey cakes by the hundred to the people who still thronged the street, while she went in search of a lodging, and all she had been able to find was the corner of this loft, where they could spread their cloaks on the floor and sleep in the midst of strangers.

But they could not sleep, though all their bones ached with weariness. They could not bear even to lie down. So they sat close together, with all the people round them snoring and murmuring in their sleep, and then suddenly Mary of Nazareth remembered a woman in whose house she had lodged years ago, and she had had a young son named Mark, who had loved Jesus and she said:

Let us go. I can find the house. It is on the other side of the city near the Damascus gate. Let us go immediately. Mark's mother will know where Jesus is.

And they rose quietly and went quickly out of the room and out of the house, and the full moon hung high over the city. And they hurried through the silent moonlit streets, and no one saw the three hooded figures, not even

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the Roman guard that was patrolling the town, for they kept in the black shadow of the walls. And so at last they came to the house of Mark's mother, and there was a light shining through the shutters of the upper room, and they knocked on the door softly, and when they had knocked twice and then three times a voice from the window said:

Who is there?

And it was Mark's mother, and Mary whispered:

Open, I pray you, in the name of my son, Jesus.

And the woman opened to them. But Jesus was gone to the garden of Gethsemane, and she was clearing away the remains of the supper he had had in her upper room with his disciples.

## Chapter Four

**I**T WAS about midnight and the four women were sitting together in that same upper room by a shaded candle, talking in whispers, for they could not settle down to rest, when they heard feet running on the roof over their heads, and a minute later a young man came through the window, and he was stark naked. They cried out in terror at the apparition, thinking it was some demon sent by Satan to harass them. But then they saw that it was Mark, the son of the house, and he stood there in the shadow with all his poor, naked body shaking, and he was panting terribly, like an animal that has been running for its life, and he whispered: They've arrested him, then staggered to the table and flung himself down with his head on his arms, all unconscious of his nakedness and wept as a child weeps, with great wrenching sobs, for he was very young.

And Mary of Nazareth strode over to him and took him firmly by his shaking shoulders and said in a strange loud voice that sounded like the voice of a man: Who has been arrested?

The Lord Jesus, the boy answered, sobbing, and ground his face against his arms.

It was a long time before they could get his story from him, he cried so. His mother fetched a cloak and wrapped him in it and lifting him in her arms held a cup of wine to his lips, but his shaking teeth grated so against it that it was almost all spilled on the floor. And Mary of Nazareth stood by, and her face in the candle light had become

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the face of a very old woman, and it seemed as if carved out of stone. And she said:

Speak, boy. Cease weeping and speak. Who has taken him? Where did it happen? Where is he now?

And at last he told them.

It was the servants of the high priest, the captain of the temple police and a band of his men. It happened in the garden of Gethsemane. I had gone to bed while Jesus was at supper, but I heard the disciples talking to him as they went out and they were all saying: We will die with thee if need be, but never deny thee, so I knew something was toward, and I got up quickly and put a coat round me and followed them. And when we came to the garden I crept in after them and hid in the bushes, for I was afraid Jesus would send me home if he saw I was there, and I did not want to leave him. Oh, I wanted to stay with him. I thought, if there's to be a fight, I can fight for him too, even if I have no weapon, for two of them had swords.

So I stayed, and they spread their cloaks on the ground as if to spend the night in the garden, and I thought, I too will stay near him all night, for I could see that he was sore troubled. There was such a look on his face, such a look! I cannot bear to think of it.

The boy buried his face in his hands and his shoulders began shaking again. But the mother of Jesus said, Enough of weeping. Tell us what happened. Be short in your speech.

And he lifted his white face and went on staring in front of him.

He said to his disciples: Sit here while I pray, and he took Peter with him and James and John and went a little deeper into the garden and I crept along with them and I heard him say to them, My soul is sorrowful even unto death. Stay here and watch, and he went forward a

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little and fell on his face on the ground and began praying, and I could hear him, and he kept saying: Father, if it be possible let this hour pass from me. Father, all things are possible with thee. Remove this cup from me. Howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilt. And he went back to the three after a time and they had fallen asleep and he said to Peter, Couldn't you watch with me one hour? and again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And I could see his face in the moonlight and his sweat was like great drops of blood falling down to the ground and I dared not go to him. And after a long time he again got up and went back to them and found them again asleep, and when he woke them saying, Why do you sleep? they didn't know what to answer, but sat stupidly rubbing their eyes. And again, for the third time, he went away alone, and I could not see him any more for the moon had moved behind the trees and a black shadow hid him, but I could hear his voice. Father, he kept saying, if it be possible. Yet not my will but Thy will be done. And then there was silence for a long time and no sound but the birds rustling in the bushes and the wind murmuring, and when at last he came out of the shadow all the trouble had gone from his face and he said to the three, Sleep on now and take your rest. The hour has come. I am betrayed. And even while he was speaking I heard the tramp of feet and saw lights moving in the trees and what seemed like a multitude of men came into the garden bearing lanterns and torches and they were armed and Judas Iscariot was with them, and he came straight to Jesus and said, Hail! Rabbi! and kissed him, and they laid hands on Jesus and took him prisoner.

The boy stopped, but the women hissed quick questions at him.

How was it?

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How could this be?

Did no one defend him?

Did they not have swords?

Yes, Peter had a sword, so did John the son of Zebedee.

But Jesus had stepped forward when he saw the band and he said, Whom seek ye? They answered, Jesus of Nazareth, and Jesus said, I am he; and when he said it the whole band of police fell backward and some of the guard fell to the ground, and I thought, It is a miracle, God is here, they cannot touch him, and I saw all the disciples standing huddled behind him, their eyes staring in the moonlight, and I think they too expected a miracle. But Jesus said, I have told you that I am he. Are you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I was with you daily in the temple teaching and you didn't take me. If then you seek me let these men go their way, and he motioned to the disciples. Then they all saw that he would do no miracle to save himself, and Peter drew his sword and smote Malchus, one of the high priest's slaves, and cut off his ear, but Jesus said, Put up your sword. The cup that my Father has given me shall I not drink it? and he put out his hand and touched the slave's ear as if Malchus were a friend and it was healed, and they were all so astounded that they did nothing to Peter. Then Jesus let the officers take him, and they bound him and led him away.

Where? broke in Mary of Nazareth. Speak! Where did they take him?

I am not sure. I followed with them, thinking they would not notice me among the servants who were carrying the torches, but they saw I was not one of them and they made to lay hold of me and seized my cloak and I left it in their hands and ran and came back across the roofs.

But Peter and James and John and the others?

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They had all left him. They fled, and so did I. Oh, so did I. And the boy fell to weeping again as if his heart would break.

But Mary of Nazareth said in that strange loud voice: Did you hear no one say where they were going?

Yes, one said they were to take him to the palace of the high priest, Caiaphas, where all the chief priests and elders were gathered together; but another said, their orders were to take him first to Annas, the old priest.

She moved to the door. I am going, she said. Will anyone come with me?

And Mary of Magdala went after her swiftly, crying, Yes, let us go. And her sister followed.

But Mark's mother called out, What can you do? You will never get into the palace. If he is a prisoner of the Sanhedrin you can do nothing.

But Jesus's mother said: That is as may be. I am going.

And at that Mark sprang to his feet saying, Yes, yes, she is right. He is all alone among them. We must try to get near him. I will show the way. And he girded himself quickly, and his mother joined him, and the boy with the four women went out into the street.

It was still some hours before daybreak, but now the streets were full of movement, for the doors of the temple were opened during the great feasts at midnight, and the shepherds were driving their flocks up to the sanctuary to be killed. And all the deep shadowy streets were full of the bleatings of the many young lambs that were going up to be sacrificed in their thousands on the morrow for the sins of the people of Israel, and the sound of a multitude of small hooves on the stones was like the sound of a softly-thundering river, and lights were appearing in many windows and the shopkeepers were beginning to take down their shutters in preparation for the great day that

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was dawning. But when they reached the palace of the old priest, Annas, the big door was shut and all was dark, nor was there any sign of any living soul moving behind the high façade with its shuttered windows.

And Mark said, They must have gone. If he were here, there would be light.

But Mary of Magdala strode to the door and began pounding on it with strong fists and at last a voice called angrily from the window in the porter's lodge:

Who is there? Would you wake the dead?

And the Magdalene answered, You have a prisoner. We would see him.

And at that the man cursed them, telling them to be off, if they cared for their own skins. There was no prisoner in the house, but there would be if they persisted in their clamours, and a woman's voice screamed from within: May all the plagues of Egypt smite you. Can you not let respectable folk sleep in peace?

But Mary called back, I will go on knocking till you tell me where they have taken Jesus of Nazareth.

And the porter growled, Ask at the house of the noble Caiaphas, thou daughter of Beelzebub, and may it bring you your just deserts.

So they hurried through the streets again, joining the helpless, distracted sheep that were stumbling in their hundreds up the Vale of the Cheese-makers, and the holy House of God loomed above them like a cloud and there were lights shining through the colonnades and small, dark figures were moving in the courtyards, for the priestly butchers were sharpening their knives to slay all these sheep for the sacrifice. And the Roman guard was on watch in the great tower of Antonia and the Roman sentries were patrolling the bridge that spanned the street from the temple to Herod's house, and from somewhere,



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high above their heads, as if in the sky, a bugle sounded.

And when they drew near to the palace of Caiaphas, they saw lights in all the windows and a bustle of men in the courtyard and a crowd had begun to gather in front of the house and a guard stood at the door. They pushed their way through the crowd till they were next the guard, and Mary of Nazareth remembered how she had stood outside the house where her son was teaching in the village near Capernaum with all the sick waiting round her, but there were no sick here, only rough men on their way to work who had stopped out of curiosity and there was no one to take him word this time that his mother was outside. Nevertheless, she addressed the guard, saying:

We are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who has been taken prisoner. Is he within?

The guard didn't so much as look at her, only stood staring like an image of wood straight ahead of him. But a rough voice answered her out of the shadow, He's within, never fear. I saw him led in and a sorry rascal he looked, with his hands bound behind him.

And other voices demanded eagerly, Who is he? Why have they taken him? Is he a murderer?

And the first man answered, No, he is a famous sorcerer. They've been after him this long time, but they couldn't take him because of his magic.

It was dark outside in the crowd, except where the light shone from the windows. But in the courtyard were flaring torches and one could see many slaves moving about and at the far end of the courtyard, one caught a glimpse of a bright fire burning in the kitchen, and men warming themselves and maidservants giving them wine to drink.

And presently two priests came out of the house and then several more and a group of Pharisaic doctors in long robes with heavy fringes and sacred phylacteries

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bound on their foreheads, and the rough loiterers whispered in awe at the sight of these august personages, saying:

Look! The senators are coming away. The trial is over. And one said, Where will he be stoned?

And another said, There's no time to stone him before the feast. They'll have to keep him till the Passover is finished.

But a third said, They have until midday. That's time and enough to stone a man to death.

And Mark's mother was weeping against her son, and Mary, the wife of Clophas, was clinging to Mary Magdalene, and she whispered to her sister, Come, sister, come away. We can do nothing.

But Mary, the mother of Jesus, stood like a pillar of granite, for she had become in this hour just such a woman as those who had arisen during the time of the martyrdom of the Jews, and she had stirred up her womanish thoughts with a manly stomach, and she was crying out to her son, though she made no sound, some such words as that other mother had said when she saw her seven sons slain before her eyes.

I cannot tell how you came into my womb, for I neither gave you breath nor life. Neither was it I that formed your limbs. Nor can I tell whence came the spirit that is in you. And I have failed you in the past and have not believed in you because you went against the faith of your fathers. But I will not fail you now. And if the Creator of the world who formed the generation of man and found out the beginning of all things, wills that you should die for his law's sake, I will believe that in his mercy he will give you eternal life again. For I know that you regarded not yourself, but have done what you have done, for love of God and pity of the world.

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And so she stood there, with all her strength gathered together, and she had need of it all, for presently a man ran out of the palace yard cowering and covering his face with his arms and crying:

I can't bear it. It is unbearable. They've got him bound in the slaves' hall and they are spitting in his face.

And the crowd closed round the fellow like greedy dogs to know more, and he fought to get free of them, saying, Let me go. Let me get away.

But they said, Tell us first what they are doing to the sorcerer.

And the man cried, He is no sorcerer but a holy rabbi, very gentle, and they're having sport with him. They're blindfolding him and cuffing him and smiting him heavy blows with their hands and shouting: Prophesy, thou Messiah! Who is it that is smiting thee? And the man broke away from them and rushed down the street.

And it was beginning to grow light and all the street was filled with grey, stagnant air, heavy as a fog, and the faces of the crowd showed pallid as the faces of dead men, and no breeze stirred. And a cock was crowing, heralding the dawn, but it seemed as if the day could not break in that stifling twilight, and the people murmured, There is a storm brewing. Please God it does not spoil the feast. And the workmen began to move off about their business, for all work of every kind must cease at midday. But Mary of Nazareth stood her ground and those who were with her.

And at last one came stumbling out of the house whom they knew, and it was Peter, the disciple, and he was crying. And Mary Magdalene caught him by the arm and he looked at her, his rugged face all streaming with tears, and said, I denied him. And the Magdalene dragged him to them and he said again, I denied him three times. I swore that I did not know him.

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But they wanted to hear about Jesus and they said, How did you get into the palace? Where is he? What will they do with him?

And at last Peter said, They are taking him at day-break to the Hall of Hewn Stones. He is to appear there before the Sanhedrin and be charged.

And Mary of Nazareth said in a stern voice, What charge will they bring against him?

But Peter did not know. John was still within, not John the son of Zebedee, the young John who was known to the chief priests. It was he who had got Peter in. If they went back to the house of Mark's mother, he would doubtless come there with news.

But Peter spoke confusedly. It was evident that he was shaken with remorse and it was also evident that he was frightened. He said:

The maidservant knew me for a Galilean by my speech. Let us get back to the house and wait and take counsel together until the boy John comes to us.

And Mark's mother seconded him, saying: Let us go. We can do the Lord Jesus no good staying here and you are all faint with hunger and weariness. They will not take him yet to the council. It is still a good hour before sunrise. We have time to eat a morsel of bread and be back again.

But Mary of Nazareth said no. Let them go and break their fast, she would wait where she was.

For of what avail is it to me, she said, to take counsel with you? I know no one of authority in Jerusalem, nor is any member of the Sanhedrin known to me. But if I stay on this spot, I may hear what the charge is and who is to witness against him and who in his defence. Young John will know these things, and he may not come to your house. But do you go, for it may be that

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some other of the disciples will knock on your door and it may be that some will have news and your house is empty. Go, and take Mark with you and send him to tell me if you learn anything of importance. And you, my sister, go and rest. Mary of Magdala will stay with me.

But her sister would not leave her, and so Mark and his mother and Peter went back together, though Mark only went on the understanding that he would be needed to run to her with news, and the three Marys stayed in front of the high priest's palace. And it grew lighter, but the light was livid and the air stifling. And every few moments servants came hurrying out of the great door, and once a Roman officer went striding in, leaving a guard outside, and the crowd increased with new people coming up constantly to ask what was toward. And there seemed to be no friends of Jesus among them, but only curious strangers agog for a sight of the prisoner. And some said he was a robber and a murderer called Barabbas, who had headed an insurrection, and others said he was a seducer and an enchanter who could command the wind and the waves of the sea. And a garrulous fellow told a story of how he had made a camel pass through the eye of a needle and turned stones into bread. And at last there was the sound of feet tramping together and he came out, surrounded by the temple police, and his mother saw as he passed that his face was marred by the blows the servants had given him. But he did not see her in the crowd, for he carried his head high and looked straight ahead of him.

But young John, the disciple, saw them, when he came out after him with the high priest's servants, and he beckoned to them, and they fell in with him and followed in the wake of the guard, and he told them quickly as they hurried along what he knew.

They had been holding a preliminary inquiry in the

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palace. Caiaphas had been sifting the evidence of the witnesses against Jesus. He, John, had not been able to get into the hall where the testimony was heard, nor had he been able to speak to Jesus. He had had to stand in the porch outside with the attendants. But one of the priests, whom he knew, had told him something of what had occurred.

Many witnesses had come forward to accuse Jesus. There was one who was a man of Nazareth, a scribe called Nathan, and some were from Capernaum and Bethsaida Julia, and they bore witness that he had broken the sabbath law and had taught false doctrine and had made blasphemous claims, making himself equal to God, and that he had continually stirred up the people to sedition. And one had sworn that he had declared himself king in Bethsaida Julia, and another that he had commanded the people to refuse to pay tribute to Cæsar, but no two had agreed together, and all had been dismissed as false, until two had come forward to swear that they had heard him threaten to destroy the holy temple and rebuild it in three days, and when these two witnesses had agreed as to the exact words and the time and place at which they were spoken, Caiaphas had called on Jesus to defend himself, but Jesus had held his peace and said nothing.

And Mary said, hurrying along beside the boy, Was it true? Did he threaten the temple and claim power to rebuild it?

And John said, No. He did not say the words they have put in his mouth nor use any threat. He prophesied that the temple would be destroyed and many of us heard him, but now they have twisted his words to condemn him.

And he was silent?

Yes, Caiaphas asked him a second time, Answereth

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thou nothing to these witnesses? and still he was silent. And at last Caiaphas said, I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Messiah, Son of God. And he said, I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven. And the high priest rent his garment and cried, What further need have we of witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy. What think ye? And all the senators answered, He is worthy of death.

They were now beneath the great steps of the holy building and the people were pouring up into it for the early morning sacrifice. But the temple guard led their prisoner another way round and young John explained that they were taking him by a side door to the Hall of Hewn Stones, where the high priest would hold a meeting of the great council and formulate a charge against him to put before the Roman governor. He would then be tried for his life by Pontius Pilate.

And Mary clung to the young boy who was scarcely older than Jesus had been when he first went up to the temple with his parents, and she knew that her son was guilty before the law of Israel of all the charges brought against him save the charge of sedition, and she said, looking out over the city:

He will surely die.

And Mary Magdalene said: They will kill him, but he cannot die. He has promised to come again.

But John said, There is still hope. The priest whom I know told me. Jesus will be tried by the governor, not for blasphemy nor false prophecy nor any transgression against the Law of Moses, but for treason against Rome and according to Roman law. All our hope lies now in Pilate.

## Chapter Five

**I**T WAS still early in the morning when Pilate, accompanied by his imperial bodyguard, came out of the judgment hall of the fortress of Antonia and mounted to the tribune in the courtyard. And all the courtyard was filled with Jews come to hear the Roman governor judge Israel. But they would not go into the judgment hall because it only lacked a few hours to the holy Feast of the Passover, and to enter the Prætorium would defile them and make it impossible for them to eat the feast. So Pilate was compelled to administer Cæsar's justice in the open, and he was bound to condemn or acquit the prisoners brought before him according to the laws of Rome, yet consider the peculiar laws of the Jews and content the people.

But the crowd in the courtyard was hostile. It hated the alien judge and it hated the power of the mighty empire behind him. Many of those gathered there that morning were friends of Barabbas, who had headed an insurrection against the Romans; and others were there, who were jealous for the authority of their own great Sanhedrin that was usurped by the Roman; and others had come in answer to a whispered message from the palace of the high priest himself. And Pilate knew that the crowd was against him. He saw that it was in a dangerous temper. He knew, moreover, that there wasn't a man among them who understood the principles of Roman



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justice or had ever heard of the law promulgated by Augustus the Great, that was now called the Julian Law of Treason. Nevertheless, he was determined to administer that law ruthlessly against the popular hero, Barabbas, who had dared defy the authority of the emperor, or against any other fanatical patriot who had made trouble. And the Julian Law laid down that an accusation of treason applied to any man guilty of an act inimical to the welfare of the Roman people or contrary to their safety or injurious to their name or the majesty of the emperor or to any private person who wilfully and maliciously assumed the functions of an official.

And Pilate waited on his judgment seat for the Sanhedrin to bring before him the murderous brute Barabbas, who was five times guilty, and his face was grim as he looked out over the crowd and his lip curled with contempt for the people whom he had to govern. And he was impatient, for he had many cases to hear that morning; among them was the preacher fellow Jesus, and there were two thieves whom he had already convicted waiting in the dungeon under him to be crucified; and at twelve o'clock he must have dealt with them all, because of the feast that was preparing even now hard by in the temple.

But the Sanhedrin didn't produce Barabbas. They came in a body led by Caiaphas bringing instead the man Jesus, and it looked to Pilate as if the whole senate of Jerusalem, with all its seventy-one holy priests and venerable doctors of law, were there as the man's prosecutors, and he looked at their prisoner with curiosity, and met for a moment the steady gaze of a pair of eyes more penetrating than any he had ever seen, and he rose to his feet abruptly and said to Caiaphas:

What accusation do you bring against this man?

And his old friend Caiaphas answered: We have found

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him perverting our nation and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.

And Caiaphas handed Pilate the roll of parchment on which the indictment was written, and a murmuring began among the people in the courtyard while he studied it.

Now there were three women standing back in the crowd, who by craning their necks could just see Pilate, but they couldn't see what he had in his hand, and though it was more important to them than to any one else, since they loved the prisoner, for he was the eldest son of one of them and the adored Master of another, they didn't know what it was that the high priest had given the governor. Indeed, they could neither see nor hear anything very well, for they didn't understand the procedure, and more and more people kept coming up into the courtyard from the temple, where all the first-born of the flocks of Israel were being slaughtered to Jehovah, and men kept pushing in front of them, shouldering them out of the way, and they had no man, not even the boy John, with them now to protect them from the crowd, for John had left them to try to gain admittance to the tribunal as a witness for the defence.

He had said: I am told that Pilate will call for the evidence. He will hear all the witnesses for and against. Remember he will care nothing for any charges against Jesus that have to do with breaking the sabbath law, or eating with unwashed hands. Our laws are nothing to him. Nor will he care about the miracles. He will think all that nonsense. He will pay attention only to the charge of sedition, and when he hears the story of what happened in Bethsaida Julia and of how Jesus refused to let the people crown him king or lead them in rebellion and repeatedly warned them against such folly and told the lawyers themselves only the other day in the temple that

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it was right to render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, when he hears these things he must acquit him, for he is a hard man, but just according to his lights.

So John had gone and they didn't know where Mark was, or Peter, nor what had become of Simon and all the other disciples. Perhaps they too were going to witness for Jesus. Surely his cousin Simon would be there. He loved Jesus so much. His mother was torn with eagerness and anxiety. She could not bear to think that her son would abandon Jesus, yet she thought, They will know that he belonged to the Zealots, and if he appears as one of Jesus's followers, they will seize him.

But perhaps he was here somewhere, in the crowd with the others. He might have found Peter and Mark. The three Marys couldn't tell. They hadn't gone back to the house of Mark's mother, but had waited until daybreak in the temple corridor outside the Hall of Hewn Stones, where the Sanhedrin were sitting. And alas, they had fallen asleep there on the stones, for they had had no sleep all the night nor scarce any rest since they left Tiberias more than ten days before. And so they had not seen Jesus when he was marched through the temple across to the Prætorium in the Fort of Antonia. And when John woke them and they hurried to the courtyard they had found it already filled with a great crowd and they could not get near the tribune, but had to stand far off on the edge of the crowd up against the great wall of the keep, and the burly forms of tall men blocked their view and others hemmed them in on all sides, and they could not see Jesus at all. They could only see Pilate, who was enthroned, and the helmets and spears of his bodyguard, and the heads of the priests and elders of Israel.

They had heard Caiaphas read out the charge, and Mary, the prisoner's mother, had heard the words, We

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have found the man forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar and saying that he is a king, and she knew that the accusation was false.

And Mary of Magdala had cried out, It is a lie.

And Mary, Simon's mother had said, Wait, wait for the the witnesses.

But the people round them had turned angrily, telling them to be quiet, and one man had made as if to silence Mary Magdalene by a blow in the face. And after that they could hear and see nothing for a long time, and they had to ask those near them what was happening, and sometimes one or another answered gruffly:

Pilate is hearing the witnesses.

Or:

The governor is taking the evidence.

And it went on and on and they had to ask again and again, and all the time Pilate was examining the evidence, they kept saying:

Who is it now? Is it a new witness? What is he saying? Is he for or against?

And always the answer was, Against.

And John wasn't called, nor Simon, nor Peter, nor Jairus the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum, how they hoped he would come forward, nor the good centurion whose servant Jesus had healed, nor Chuza, Herod's steward, though he must be in Jerusalem with Herod, just across the bridge, nor anyone. And no one told the story of how Jesus had quelled the uprising in Bethsaida Julia and turned all the throng against him because he would not lead them against Cæsar, nor did anyone throw the words about paying tribute to Cæsar back into the teeth of his accusers, for his accusers were the great men of the nation, and no one dared declare that their evidence was false. And there wasn't a soul that day to

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say a good word for Jesus of Nazareth, who had done so much good to so many. If there was, neither his mother nor her sister nor Mary Magdalene heard it. Nor did anyone in all the throng gathered before the tribunal seem to be sorry for the man who had had such pity on the sick and broken-hearted, for his friends were not there. They were outcasts, lepers, humble provincials and sinners according to the Law of Israel, and they had not come up to the great holy feast. Indeed, there seemed to be no men of Galilee anywhere in the crowd, nor did the three women see any familiar faces, but all around them were the hard faces of Judeans.

And at last Pilate called on Jesus to defend himself against his accusers, and Jesus was pushed forward by his guards, and he stood in full view of the crowd with his hands bound behind him facing his Roman judge, and the three women could see him now and they could see that Pilate was questioning him. But Jesus seemed to be silent and they said to those standing near them:

What is he saying? What does he answer?

And a man said, He answers nothing.

And they saw that Pilate was staring at him in perplexity, and when the Roman spoke again, they heard him, for he said in a loud voice:

Do you answer nothing to all these accusations?

And the prisoner answered nothing, not even one word. And Mary Magdalene whispered:

Oh! why does he not answer? Why does he say nothing?

And a man near her said: He doesn't answer because he can't. He knows well enough that he is guilty.

And it was evident to everyone that Pilate was exasperated by the prisoner's silence, for he shouted at him:

Speakest thou not to me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee and to release thee?

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And at last Jesus spoke, but the women of Galilee could not hear what he said. Indeed, his mother could hear and see nothing just then, for at the word crucify all the world had gone black, and it was to her as if she were flung into a pit with a sword twisting in her entrails, and the sweat poured from her face and she fell against the man in front of her and would have gone down to the ground under all their feet had the people not been packed so close around her.

She had prepared herself for his death. She had thought that he might be thrown down from the wall or stoned, according to the custom of her people, but that he should suffer the slow Roman torture reserved for the lowest criminals and be crucified, for this she had not been prepared. And her flesh revolted; all her body, out of which he had come, cried out, and the womb that had borne him and the breasts that had suckled him screamed with pain; and she remembered the day when she had carried him in her arms as a very young child, only a few weeks old he was, to the great temple, to dedicate him to the most high God of Israel; and she remembered how she had bought him back from the terrible God who claimed as his own all the first-born sons of Israel. Two turtle doves was all she and Joseph could afford. But it was enough, according to the Law: and yet it was not enough, for now, this same God to whom was being offered that very day the blood of ten thousand lambs, he the jealous God, was not satisfied. Why? What did it mean? What had Jesus done that the great God of all the world should be angry? What had she done, or Joseph? Her spirit rose up to defy the God whom she had worshipped since the day she was born, and she cried out within her saying to God the Invisible King:

He has done nothing that you should let him be cruci-

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fied. He has loved you from the beginning with all his heart and all his strength and all his might, and his neighbour as himself.

And her face was the colour of ashes and the eyes in her face were fierce, like the eyes of a tiger, and her lips were drawn back over her teeth by the anguish in her, till her mouth looked like the angry mouth of a savage beast. But the other two Marys were crying out softly to the men round them:

What did he say? Oh tell us what he said.

And a man growled, He says that Pilate has no power whatever against him.

But another said, No. He spoke blasphemy. He said the Roman would have no power over him unless it were given him from above.

And the two women twisted their hands together, for they could not understand what was going on between Jesus and the Roman; but Mary of Nazareth didn't move. And then it seemed to them that Pilate's face changed as he faced Jesus and they thought they saw a look of fear on it, and they stood on tip-toe and saw how the Roman wriggled in his seat and began biting his finger like a man at a loss, while he looked Jesus up and down. But at last he leaned forward and said with a sneer:

Answer. Art thou King of the Jews?

And Jesus said, Do you ask this question of yourself or because others have said it to you?

And Pilate said, Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you up to me. What have you done? Art thou then a king?

And Jesus said, so that all the people heard him:

I am. Yet my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the men of Judea.

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And at that a snigger ran across the crowd like a scampering rat. But Pilate scowled at the crowd and repeated his question, staring at the prisoner again as if astounded at the man's audacity, yet puzzled.

And Jesus said, You say that I am a king. For this was I born and for this did I come into the world that men might know the truth.

And Pilate thought in that moment that he had to do with a madman; and he rose from his seat, exasperated with this mad Jew and his phantom kingdom and his talk of truth, and he said to himself: The fellow is a harmless lunatic who's got all the pack of them down on him because he has broken some one of their holy laws. And he was very angry with Caiaphas for bringing such a man before him on a charge of treason, and he remembered how Caiaphas had complained of his driving the money-changers out of the temple, and he thought, Here's a Jew hated by all the Jews in this place. He's probably a better man than any of them, and he said to Caiaphas:

This man hath done nothing worthy of death.

And all the Jews who were ranged on the tribune cried out, We have a law and by our law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God.

And Pilate said, Take him then and judge him according to your own laws.

But they cried out again, We have no power to condemn a man to death.

And Pilate's face became very obstinate and he said, I find no fault with this man. You have brought him to me on a charge of sedition and I find that he has done nothing worthy of the death penalty. I shall, therefore, chastise him and release him.

And the high priest's face grew black with anger, as



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did all the faces of the great men of Jerusalem who stood with him, and he said in a loud voice:

He has stirred up the people throughout all Galilee, even unto this place.

And there were loud murmurs everywhere in the crowd, and the three women who had been straining their ears to hear the dispute between Pilate and Jesus's accusers, held their breath, and their desperate eyes were fixed on the Roman, but most desperate were the eyes of his mother, for her only hope lay now, no longer in Jehovah, but in the infidel. And she knew that the Roman held the fate of her son in his hands and she watched him and saw him start at something that had been said and hesitate and ask a question, then turn suddenly and with a gesture of command towards Jesus leave the tribune. And a moment later Jesus was led after him into the fortress.

And Mary Magdalene said in a whisper, God be praised. He will release him. Oh God be praised! The Roman is going to save him.

And the tears poured down her face, and Mary, the mother of Simon, wept too with relief, but Jesus's mother did not weep or speak or take her eyes from the door through which her son had disappeared.

And a long time passed, and all the people began talking and murmuring together and they said:

Why doesn't Pilate get on with the business? There are other men better than this Jesus waiting to be tried.

And some began to call Barabbas; and others took up the cry until presently all the throng was chanting in rhythm, Barabbas. We want Barabbas. Give us Barabbas.

But no one came out of the fort. For Pilate, when he heard the word Galilee had remembered Herod, and had asked if Jesus were a Galilean, and being told that he was, he had thought suddenly: This is the chance I was wait-

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ing for. I'll flatter the tetrarch by handing the prisoner over to him, and he had sent Jesus under escort across the bridge that spanned the bazaar to Herod's palace with a message saying:

Here is a subject of yours who lays claim to your throne. What shall I do with him?

And it was now long after sunrise, yet the sun hadn't risen. There was a light like twilight over the city, and the sky lay like a thick blanket on the great towers and battlemented walls and it was stifling in the courtyard and some women in the crowd fainted and men looking up between the high walls muttered uneasily to themselves, for there was a pulse beating in the air like the throbbing pulse of some awful, uneasy spirit. And all the people who were waiting felt sick as men do on the eve of some expected calamity, and they began to cry out again for Barabbas and for Jesus and for Barabbas again, scarcely knowing what they were saying. And then suddenly a deathly stillness fell on the whole multitude, for the great door of the Prætorium swung open and an apparition appeared in it. A man bound, but clothed in a gorgeous robe of royal purple and his face above it was bruised and livid with exhaustion and his eyes burned with anguish, and there was that about the figure that hushed them for a moment with horror.

He was their Messiah, and had they not been driven out of their land and scattered to the ends of the earth, he might have become known, after they had killed him, as the great holy hero of Israel. But the walls that enclosed the throng that day were going to be torn down and the temple was going to be destroyed, and those Jews who were to found a church in his name were going to be persecuted and killed and driven into final exile, and Rome was going to take this man from Israel and make

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him its own Christ. But no one knew who he was that day. No one in all the throng recognised him.

Yet there had been prophets in Israel who had known that he would come just as he was; a great unknown man of remote antiquity had looked down the ages and seen him and cried out to warn the people:

When we shall see him there is no beauty that we desire in him. He is despised and rejected of men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid our faces from him . . . We esteemed him not . . . We did esteem him stricken of God and afflicted.

And Pilate came out after the prisoner on to the tribune and he stood before the hushed crowd and his face was full of loathing and his voice lashed the air like a whip, and he said:

Behold your king.

And the crowd became like a wild beast under his mockery and a yell sprang from it: Crucify him! Crucify him! And Pilate stood sneering at them.

And Jesus's case was lost. For Pilate, who might have saved him, had offered his life as a peace-offering to Herod, and Herod had been pleased by the flattery, and had been delighted to have Jesus brought before him, for he had been curious about this man who was said to be such a great magician, and he hoped that he would perform some miracle. But Jesus, standing bound before him, had done nothing, and when the tetrarch questioned him he had not answered, and his silence had infuriated the dissolute savage, and he and his courtiers who had been feasting all the night with Herodias and all the nobles of the land, had dressed Jesus up as a prince and had had much sport with him, then sent him back to Pilate in his gorgeous apparel.

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And Pilate had understood Herod's gesture as meaning that the tetrarch did not consider Jesus a dangerous pretender, or care what became of such a sorry fellow, and he had taken his cue from Herod and wanting to be friends with him had lent himself to the barbarian's rick-baldry, and he had made up his mind to humiliate both the Jews and their prisoner by showing him to them dressed as a prince and then letting him go. So he said again:

Shall I crucify your king? What harm has he done? I have examined him before you and have found no truth in your accusations. Nor has Herod. I will, therefore, scourge him and release him. Ye have a custom that I should release unto you a prisoner at the Passover. I will, therefore, release unto you the King of the Jews.

But a yell of rage met him. He had reckoned without the mob or the race-pride of the mighty Sanhedrin. The people were mad with lust now for the blood of the exhausted man who stood before them as the travesty of a king, and all the chief priests and elders were wild under the insult, and they shouted with the crowd:

Not this man! Barabbas! Away with this man! Crucify him! Give us Barabbas!

And Pilate was very angry, for he knew that Barabbas was a murderer who deserved to die, while this Jesus who swayed on his feet in the royal robe Herod had put on him, his anguished eyes filled with the vision of his phantom kingdom, was innocent before the law of Rome and not guilty of any treason against the majesty of the emperor, and his sense of justice revolted at the thought of sparing Barabbas and throwing Jesus to the mob. And he tried again to reason with them. But they cried all the louder:

Crucify him! Crucify him! If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend. Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar.

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And Pilate saw that he could not prevail on them, but that a tumult was rising, and a great loathing for all the people seized him, and he laughed at them and said for the last time:

Shall I crucify your king?

And they shouted: We have no king but Cæsar.

And with that Pilate gave over, for what, after all, did the life of any Jew matter to him? If they would see this man crucified, then let him be crucified. He would deliver him up to them, but he would wash his hands of the bloody business. And he sent for a basin and there before Caiaphas and all the chief priests and elders of Israel and all the people, he washed his hands of the blood of Jesus of Nazareth, and the people answered:

His blood be on us and on our children.

And Jesus stood there and his mother and her sister and Mary Magdalene watched it all from far back on the edge of the crowd.

## Chapter Six

**T**HEN Pilate set Barabbas free, but he handed Jesus over to the soldiery to be scourged and crucified. And they took him into the Prætorium and stripped him and he was tied in a stooping posture to a post and beaten horribly with leather thongs that had sharp pieces of bone knotted into the ends, until all his flesh was torn, for flagellation was a part of the death penalty and was meant to half kill the man before he was crucified. And after that the whole band of soldiers gathered round him to make sport of him until everything should be ready. And they put his royal robe on him again and plaited a crown of thorns and put it on his head and put a staff in his hand and mocked him, crying, Hail! King of the Jews! and they took the staff and smote him on the head with it, and they spat on him as his other priestly guard had already done that night, and kneeled down before him as if to a king or a god and worshipped him; and when they had done mocking him, they put his own clothes on him again and led him out under military escort to crucify him.

And it didn't occur to any of the Roman officers or their men to pity him, for he was a Jew, condemned to a form of death reserved by the Romans for slaves and traitors and criminals of only the lowest type; and even though Pilate had given no verdict of guilt against Jesus, and knew him to be innocent before the law, nevertheless

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by consenting to crucify him he had made him an object of infamy and the proper target for any man's cruelty. Indeed, crucifixion was looked upon with such intense horror by the great civilised world of Rome that it was never inflicted on Roman citizens, both because of the infamy connected with it and its protracted suffering. For men died very slowly on the cross. They would sometimes live for three days or more, hanging there, exposed to heat by day and cold by night, and would remain fully conscious up to the very moment of death and would be jeered at and tormented by every passer-by until they died at last of exposure and exhaustion. But the respectable folk who jeered at them were careful not to come too near, for the crucified were accursed and the ground on which the crosses were erected was unclean, even though their foul, accursed bodies were hung in the air so that they should not defile the earth, and were left there after death till the vultures had devoured them and their bones fell down.

And Pilate knew when he signed Jesus's death warrant to please the crowd that he was doing all this to an innocent man and he was filled with hatred for the people who had made a coward of him, and he determined that he should have his revenge on the members of the great Sanhedrin, and that no soul in Jerusalem who passed this man's cross or saw him led through the streets should fail to understand why Jesus of Nazareth was being crucified, and so he commanded a sign to be painted bearing his accusation. It was a white-washed board, and on it were large black letters, and when the procession left the Prætorium for the place where the great stakes were driven into the ground outside the wall of the city, a soldier carried the sign in front of the condemned man, and it bore the words:

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This is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

These titles were always made by the Romans and carried in front of the condemned man to impress his shame on the criminal himself and on the crowd. But Jesus's title was designed by Pilate to put to shame the mighty men of the Sanhedrin, and it did what it was designed to do. When the chief priests and elders of Israel saw Jesus led out and read the sign, they ran to Pilate in a frenzy and implored him to change it.

Write not the King of the Jews, but that he said: I am King of the Jews.

But Pilate answered:

What I have written, I have written.

And the morning sacrifices in the temple were just ended when the centurion and his guard left the Prætorium with their prisoners. And the streets were thronged with people, and all the fathers of families were carrying away on their shoulders the lambs that had been killed, for they would feast that night in memory of the day when God had delivered His holy nation out of Egypt. And Jesus and the two thieves who were going to be crucified with him, each carried the wooden crossbar to which their hands were to be nailed and a crowd followed them. And many women of Jerusalem followed with them who bewailed and lamented the condemned men and their mournful cries shrilled through the streets like the cries of birds of the desert, and the sound they made was the ageless sound of the East that from time immemorial has accompanied the dead.

They hadn't very far to go. The place that was called the Place of a Skull, or Calvary in the Greek tongue, was in a gully just outside the second wall of the city near a gate and close to a high road. And the crossbars of the three prisoners were not too heavy for strong men to



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carry. But Jesus couldn't carry his. He stumbled and fell under it. He wasn't a particularly strong man, and he had been led about like a beast with a halter round his neck ever since he had been arrested in the garden of Gethsemane in the middle of the night. First to Annas, then to Caiaphas, then through the streets and up the great steps of the temple to the Hall of Hewn Stones, then across the temple to the Prætorium, then to Herod's palace, then back again once more across the high bridge over the ravine to stand on the tribune arrayed as a mock king before a mob that yelled for his blood, and finally after nine hours of being cross-questioned and beaten with blows and spat at and jeered at, he had been horribly scourged.

It is impossible to measure his suffering. No one has ever known, or ever will know, what he endured, for no one has ever been at once so powerful and so vulnerable and so exquisitely alive. For him there was no relief from any single jot of pain, nor any fanatical exaltation of spirit that could transport him out of his body while his body was tortured. He did not go to the cross as a martyr, lifted by faith into regions of bliss while he died. Simon Peter and John, the son of Zebedee, and his own brother James and the boy John, who was so gifted and so brave, were to be martyred for his sake and were to die strong in the knowledge that he loved them with an undying love. But he did not know that morning that they loved him, for they were not there, and he could not know that they would carry on his gospel of the Kingdom. He was not exalted. He was broken-hearted. He had failed to convince his nation. He had not succeeded in his utterly simple, tremendous business of ushering in the reign of God by changing the hearts of the people. He went to his death knowing that his nation hated him, and

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he was not even confident that God was satisfied with what he had done. But he was determined to do God's will. He still believed in the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. He was dying because he believed this, and since it was the will of God that he should die, he would drain to the last drop the cup that God held to his lips.

It was for the sake of his own people. While all the wise men of Israel were splitting hairs of doctrine and elaborating the six hundred and fifteen holy laws, he had called on men to act so that they might know the truth. While all the philosophers of the wide Hellenic world were discussing the great illusion of the cosmos, he, Jesus of Nazareth, had declared that the world was neither an illusion nor an insoluble enigma, but a creation of God's spirit that men could perfectly understand if they would only become like himself, innocent children of God. And he believed that his race were destined to prove this to the world. He had turned back at Cæsarea Philippi; he had clung to his own; he was a Jew, faithful unto death to his God and his nation, ready to die and endure every agony and every ignominy for what he knew to be true. But he had never claimed to be omnipotent or equal to God. He had only claimed to know God and love Him and be His son, and the measure of his great claim was the measure of his suffering.

Two young boys had tried to defend him against the mighty power of Israel and Rome. Only that John, who was scarcely more than a child, found his way to the place where he was crucified. Never in all the history of the world has there been a lonelier man than this man who was staggering to his death behind a sign that bore the words: This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

And the part of the cross that he carried was too much

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for him. He fell under it in the street, and the Roman centurion in charge of him summoned a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, who was coming in from the country, and made him carry his cross; and while this was happening the women crowded round him, where he had fallen, wailing over him and making those shrill, uncanny cries of lamentation, and he looked round at them as he got up and said:

Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold the days are coming when they shall say: Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bear and the paps that never give suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: Fall on us, and to the hills: Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry.

And his mother was there among the women of Israel and Mary her sister and Mary Magdalene, and they followed him to the Place of a Skull. And they stood a little way off while the soldiers laid the crossbar on the ground and bound and nailed his hands to it, and they saw the soldiers give him wine to drink mingled with frankincense and the juice of the poppy-seed, so that when he was hoisted upright, the first agony would be dulled. But they saw that when he had tasted it he would not drink.

And all the crowd had withdrawn so that they should not be defiled by the ground that was accursed, but his mother stood near the foot of the cross in the gully under the great wall and the other two Marys stood with her, and it was right for her to be there. Was she not a woman of Israel? Was she not descended from such women as Rizpah, whose two sons had been crucified by David the King as an atonement to the Gideonites in the days when there was a great famine in the land? And was it not written how Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth

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and spread it upon a rock from the beginning of the barley harvest when her sons were crucified until the autumn rains; and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night? Two months had Rizpah watched by the crucified bodies of the sons whom she bore to Saul, and it was told David what she had done, and David went and took their bones and the bones of Saul, their father, and buried them in the country of Benjamin in the sepulchre of Kish, the father of Saul.

Could Mary, the mother of Jesus, know how long her son would hang there? Must she not protect his body from the carrion who even now were circling slowly high overhead? She didn't know that he was going to die in three short hours. She didn't know that Pilate would allow him to be buried that very day. She didn't know that on the third day he was going to rise from the dead and appear to Mary Magdalene first and then to Peter and John, the son of Zebedee, and then to the others. Nor did she know that when he had risen from the dead the disciples who had abandoned him in his agony would know that he was the Messiah. Now while he still lived, bound to the cross with all his joints dislocated and nails through his hands and feet, she knew only that he was her son and that she must keep vigil beside him.

And the sky grew dark over the Holy City. Though it was morning, darkness, like the coming of night, hung over the temple and the great towers of Jerusalem. And from all the city people came hurrying to see him crucified with the two thieves on either side of him. The priest came and the venerable doctors of the Sanhedrin and many idle folk; and his friends from Galilee came and stood at a distance. And a great crowd gathered on the city wall whence they could look down on him without being pol-

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luted by his infamous death; and along the high road above him passed a throng of people going up from the outlying villages to the great feast of the Lord.

And when the soldiers had crucified him and the two thieves with him, they divided his clothes among them, casting lots for his cloak. Then they sat down on the ground and watched him there.

They had set up over his head the title that bore his accusation, and the passers-by reading the sign railed on him, wagging their heads and saying:

Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it up again in three days, save thyself and come down from the cross.

And the chief priests and the rulers of Jerusalem mocked him from the top of the wall and scoffed at him, and the venerable scribes derided him, saying:

He saved others, himself he cannot save. Let the King of Israel now come down from the cross and we will believe.

And loud, mocking voices kept calling out:

If thou be the Messiah, come down. If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself.

Even the soldiers mocked him, and the two thieves that were crucified with him, they, too, reproached him.

But John, the very young disciple, had found his way to the cross and stood there with Mary, the mother of Jesus. Did he see them? Did he speak to them? They thought that he did. They said so afterwards. And perhaps it was true that Jesus through eyes glassy with agony saw the young boy clinging to his mother and remembered his own boyhood when he had been so happy and so loved. Indeed, in those awful moments he must have remembered everything from the very beginning. All his life must have passed before him and all his childhood

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come back to him, and it seemed as he hung there that he was glad to know that this young boy would be a son to his mother, who had not believed in him, yet had not failed him in the end.

But who can know what he felt on the cross or who could remember truly how the slow, relentless, irrevocable minutes passed? Peter was not there nor James nor John, the sons of Zebedee, nor his cousin Simon, nor any one of his disciples. Nor was it his death that proved to them at last that he was the Messiah, but his resurrection; and perhaps had it not been for Mary of Magdala, no one would ever have seen him after his death, or believed, or known that he was the immortal Son of God come to save the world. For it was she who went first to the sepulchre and found it empty and met him, and though at first she thought he was the gardener of the grave-yard, she had known him and run and told them that she had seen and spoken to her Lord.

But it was dark when he died. A dreadful darkness was all over the land, and a shadow covered the cross, and he was alone in the shadow of death.

Once he said: I thirst. But no one seems to have given him to drink when he said it. The soldiers sat on the ground, the crowd railed from a distance, the vultures wheeled high overhead, and the slow minutes dropped into the past one by one.

And then suddenly at about the ninth hour he cried with a loud voice:

Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is being interpreted: My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?

And a shudder passed through the crowd, and some who stood there when they heard it said:

He is calling Elijah.

And one of the soldiers ran at last and took a sponge

## Mary of Nazareth

and filled it with vinegar and put it on the end of a pole and held it up to him to drink, but the rest said:

Let be. Let us see whether Elijah will come and save him.

And even while they were waiting for a last sign Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and it was finished; he was dead.

And all his friends who had followed him from Galilee stood afar off beholding these things, and all the people that came together at that sight smote their breasts and went away; and it was said afterwards that the earth quaked when he gave up the ghost, and that the great veil of the temple before the Holy of Holies was torn from top to bottom. And ever since that day men have not ceased to relate many things, true and untrue, about Mary who once lived in Nazareth in Galilee, and her son Jesus who was crucified when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea.

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